TWO BOYS IN BEAVER-LAND

BY

MAJOR A. RADCLYFFE DUGMORE

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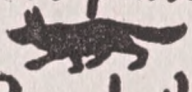
TWO BOYS IN BEAVER-LAND

Of the Canadian Woods, the animals that live there & more particularly the Beaver 
This is a story for Boys, both young & old & for Girls, who are interested in the lives & habits of the wild creatures & in the wonders of the open air Life among the sweet scented firs & placid lakes & where the sparkling rivers bid us come away from the restless cities
The two Boys were introduced to my friends in "*Adventures in Beaver Stream Camp*" in which was recounted their ex-periences when last in Newfoundland.

Suddenly from behind the beaver lodge a gigantic bull moose appeared almost on top of the startled boys

TWO BOYS IN BEAVER-LAND

A Book of the Woods
Written, Illustrated & Designed
By

Major A. Radclyffe Dugmore
F.R.G.S. F.R.P.S.

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"Camera Adventures in the African Wilds"
"Romance of the Newfoundland Caribou"
"When the Somme Ran Red"
"Bird Homes" Etc.

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TWO BOYS IN BEAVER-LAND

Two Boys In Beaver-land

CHAPTER I

After recovering from severe illness Jack Sylvester and Charlie Mason are ordered to the woods of Canada.

MRS. SYLVESTER was standing against the fireplace in the large living room, staring with unseeing, tear-filled eyes at the crackling logs. Her pale face showed signs of suffering and anxiety; the slight rustling of a wind-blown curtain startled her violently, while her glance at the stairs which led into the room showed that she was anxiously expecting someone to appear. Fear showed in her face as though she dreaded to see the person for whose coming she looked.

Only the crackling of the burning logs, and the gentle, rhythmic ticking of the clock on the mantel disturbed the quiet of the house. Again and again Mrs. Sylvester glanced at the clock whose hands moved so slowly. Minute after minute passed and still nothing happened. For nearly half an hour the silent woman stood motionless, when the slight noise of a door being opened and closed caused her to turn her head quickly toward the sound.

Then came the light tread of someone at the head of the stairs, and the woman was seized with the dizziness of fear. She scarcely dared to keep her face turned in the direction of the footsteps. A man was coming down the stairs, and the look on that man's face would mean life or death! The woman's eyes were blinded by the tears that would not be denied. She clutched nervously at the white mantel-piece to prevent herself from falling. The man caught sight of her and quickened his step. Would he never speak? Would he never open his lips to say the words she longed to hear? An eternity passed before he reached her side.

"My dear Mrs. Sylvester"—why, oh why, did he waste time with those unnecessary words! Why didn't he say the words she wanted!——

But she heard no more; the strain of the past days—or were they years? had sapped her strength, and she dropped to the floor before the doctor could catch her. A few moments later consciousness returned, and she found herself lying on the sofa with her husband kneeling at her side, while the doctor, deeply moved, stood staring at the fire.

"Jack is out of danger, dear," she heard her husband say, "and Charlie is doing splendidly."

Was it all a dream? Was the boy really safe? It was no dream, and the news was the

glorious truth, thank God! Her boy was not going to be taken from her! What more could she wish?

Doctor Saunders, feeling that his presence was no longer needed, said good-bye and repeated that everything was going as well as possible, and that nothing remained to be done but the best of nursing.

"We shall have the two boys out and about in a few weeks, and you will both forget these terrible days of anxiety. I shall look in early this afternoon; till then good-bye. Call me up if there is the slightest reason, but really you have nothing to fear. I have given the most careful instructions to the nurses."

What had happened in that usually cheerful house in the Boston suburb? The Sylvesters' son, Jack, and their adopted son, Charlie, had both been struck down by that scourge, the "flu"; with Charlie it had developed into a fairly slight attack of pneumonia. This had caused considerable anxiety, but, thanks to his splendid constitution, he had passed the crisis without much difficulty. Jack, however, had developed double pneumonia, and for two days the doctor and nurses had fought the dread disease with all the skill of modern science. The battle had been against fearful odds, but science and love had won. The dreaded crisis had passed that morning, and now, as the

doctor had said, careful nursing aided by the boy's natural strength was all that was needed.

Mrs. Sylvester went up with her husband to see their boy and found him sleeping peacefully. How pale he looked, how different from the rugged, brown boy who the previous year had come back from Newfoundland after having been lost for a year! And yet was it not most probably due to the strength he had gained during that year out in the wilds that he had been able to win this struggle against death? Silently she kissed the cool forehead. She turned to the nurse, but could not speak. Her hands grasped the nurse's hand, she bent down and kissed it with gratitude. Leaving the room the husband and wife went in to tell their daughter Evelyn, who was sitting by Charlie's bed side; she was his self-appointed nurse and was jealous of any one who tried to help her. Charlie was dozing when the Sylvesters entered the room, and Evelyn, who had not realized how near death her brother had been, put up a warning finger to her lips; but Charlie had awakened and turned his head toward the two who were standing silently at the door. Their faces showed that something had been happening and he inquired in consternation what it was that they had come to tell him. Mrs. Sylvester could only lean over his bed and kiss him while the blessed tears of gratefulness fell on his pale face.

Her husband came to the rescue and told in a few words what had happened and how happy they should all feel.

"Poor old Jack!" was Charlie's only comment, while Evelyn made a bolt from the room in her attempt to hide her deep emotion.

And after that the days passed quickly, the glories of early spring gave way to the riper glories of approaching summer. The two boys were allowed out of doors to enjoy the health-giving sunshine. Their illness had been very severe and their recovery would not be hurried. Very slowly their strength returned but Jack's condition caused a certain amount of anxiety. Finally, one day when they were at the sea shore for change of air, Doctor Saunders came to make a careful examination, with the result that he strongly recommended that Jack should be sent away to live out of doors for some months. A long camping trip would be the best thing in the world, he said. The advice caused considerable commotion in the family, each member having his or her own ideas on the possibilities. Charlie was perhaps the most worried; he saw a wonderful long stay in the wild woods which he loved so much, but it was then June and before very long he would have to return to school, and so would be unable to go far away or stay for the many months suggested by Doctor Saunders.

The mere idea of Jack going anywhere without him was impossible to imagine. Yet how could it be otherwise? Such were the thoughts which possessed his mind when the family grouped about the large porch overlooking the sea.

The Sylvesters' great friend Fred Pratt had come down to hear the result of the doctor's examination and he now formed part of the important council of war which was to decide on the fate of the two boys. Charlie, in great need of sympathy and support, sat by the side of Evelyn on the swinging hammock. He knew she would understand his anxiety even though he said not a word. One does not always have to tell one's thoughts. Mrs. Sylvester, fearing that the doctor had kept back something, was looking very much worried, as she sat near her husband with her trembling hand resting on his arm. Everyone was looking unreasonably solemn when Mr. Pratt, with his usual jovial way, called the meeting to order by rapping his large fist on the table with such vigour that it nearly upset the pitcher of ice water.

"What's the matter with you all? The whole bunch of you look as though you were considering the best place in the cemetery for your family vault, instead of planning where to go for a glorious long trip to the woods. Get off with your glum looks and see what's to be done. I believe, Jack,

you young rascal, that you're a deep-dyed villain, and have got the doctor bribed to order you off to your favourite haunts. Eh! How about it?"

His jolly manner caused a smile to appear on every face. Even Charlie looked a little bit hopeful.

"Come on now, Sylvester, what's your idea? Ship 'em both back to Newfoundland, the country of their fame? I'll bet that's what they would like."

Charlie gasped at the word "they." Did it mean that he would be sent with his chum after all?

"No! Fred. Saunders is not in favour of Newfoundland. He wants a drier and more wooded country, suggests Canada, either Quebec or Ontario, pretty well north, where it is not liable to be too hot. What are your own ideas, Jack, for after all you are the one most concerned?"

Ever since their extraordinary experiences, when they were lost for a year in Newfoundland, the two boys had longed for an opportunity of making a close study of the beaver and their work, but the idea had always seemed so remote, owing to the fact that schooling was considered necessary for young men of these days, and the said schooling always occupied the most precious months of the year. The autumn, which was *the* time for study-

ing beaver, was bound to be taken up with mere books; then, when school and college days had finished there would be no chance for taking up their favourite subjects in the wilds, as they would surely be launched on some sort of business career. It may be easily understood, then, that their hopes had not been high. But here, at this unexpected time, an opportunity was actually offering itself. Jack glanced with a meaning look toward Charlie as he replied to his father's question:

"If we cannot go to Newfoundland, Dad, I think we would both rather choose the upper part of Ontario, where there are lakes and rivers and woods enough to suit the doctor. The fishing is good, too, but we have another reason for wishing to go there."

"Go ahead, you young schemer. I can see that Mr. Pratt wasn't so far wrong when he said you had planned all this. What's your scheme?"

"It's beaver, we both want so much to have an opportunity of studying them; the little we saw of their wonderful work in Newfoundland interested us, as you know, so much that we called our camp 'Beaver Stream Camp.' In those days we did not have much time for anything but trying to live, and you never would send us anything in the way of luxuries."

Jack hesitated a moment as he saw the rather

pained look on his mother's face. Too well did she remember that awful year of anxiety and misery when she believed that her son and Charlie had gone for ever.

"Oh, you crue parents!" laughed Mr. Pratt. "To think of your never sending the dear boys anything! But wait a minute, it wasn't your fault after all. You cold-blooded young imps, why did you never send your postal address? Such carelessness I never knew. Really, Sylvester, I think they should be severely punished. Six months hard labour in the wilds of Canada I suggest as their punishment. What does the Court say, all in favour signify their will by saying Aye." Five Ayes were voiced immediately. "Contrary minded say No!" Dead silence. "The Ayes have it, but I doubt whether the prisoners have the right to vote; however, we'll let that point go. What's that, Evelyn?"

"I was only going to ask if they may have two months taken off the sentence for good behaviour, because it's awful cold up there in December and they may not be able to send us their address if the snow gets deep."

"Good idea, young woman, it would be rather cold; their sentence, as suggested, will therefore terminate on the last day of November."

During these proceedings, Charlie's spirits had

been steadily rising. Evidently there was no question about his going, and he already saw himself paddling the heavily laden canoe through those wonderful Northern waters, when an unexpected jolt came in the form of a question from Mr. Sylvester.

"How about school?" he asked. "The doctor did not say it was necessary for *Charlie* to go, and he really should not miss his studies." Had any one been watching Mr. Sylvester during the meeting they would have seen that he looked at Charlie very frequently and had apparently read the boy's thoughts; they would also have seen a merry little twinkle in his gray eyes when he asked the alarming question. But somehow no one had noticed these details. Even Mrs. Sylvester had failed to see through his well-feigned expression of seriousness, and after a moment's silence, particularly painful for two of the party, she gasped rather than said: "Oh, but I simply could not let Jack go without Charlie!"

How Charlie loved her at that moment, not only for what she said, but for the way in which she said it. Mr. Sylvester could no longer keep back his mirth, but burst into a mighty peal of laughter in which, after a moment's pause, he was joined by them all.

"Oh Lord! how you did bite, and Charlie's face,

the funniest thing I ever saw," he jerked out as he regained his breath. "How I wish the trout would rise as quickly as you do! My dear, you're simply wonderful."

"I don't care, you're a horrid mean old tease—isn't he, Fred?" Mrs. Sylvester said, turning to Mr. Pratt. But she got little sympathy. Mr. Pratt simply laughed and remarked, "Some tease!"

Jack, in the meantime, had gone over and had crowded himself into the hammock with his sister and Charlie. A happy trio they were; the mere prospect of a trip to the woods was something for which to be thankful. The senior members of the council now left the porch so the younger ones were able to indulge to their hearts' content in plans and schemes.

Evelyn started the conversation by saying: "Now what I want to know is where does poor little me come in on this expedition? You left me behind once before, and the consequences, as you remember, were highly disastrous. You will only get lost again. Really you are not fit to be trusted by yourselves. In fact you need me to look after you and see that you do not do mad things; so I want to know how it can be worked for me to be included in the party. The doctor won't order me off for my health, as I look altogether too well."

This was perfectly true: a more delightfully

healthy girl could not be found. Evelyn was fourteen years old, and rather mature-looking for her age, exceedingly pretty though not really beautiful, as her features were not quite as regular as they should have been. Her hair added greatly to her charm as it always resented being kept in restraint: the wavy locks of rich golden brown had a delightful way of falling over her temples and giving a most attractive effect. In disposition she was inclined to be quiet and reserved, very slow to make friends, but truly devoted to the few people she liked. Having no sister she had always been in the closest companionship with her brother Jack, who was two years her senior, and with Charlie Mason a fine lad of nearly seventeen who had lived with the Sylvesters exactly as one of the family ever since that terrible day when his father, who had been a very intimate friend of the Sylvesters, was killed in an accident. His mother he could scarcely remember, but Mrs. Sylvester was all that a mother could be to him, and in every way treated him as her own son.

Evelyn's appeal left the two boys looking rather blank; to go off for several months without her was not at all what they wished. She was a thoroughly good hand in camp life, having been brought up to know how to make herself both useful and happy. She fished well, was an expert in handling

a canoe, in fact she joined in all the boys' sports except shooting. Shooting she hated, and was partly responsible by her attitude for the boys' apathy to what is so often a boy's greatest amusement. After a moment's silence, Charlie, whose mind had been working quickly, looked up with a decidedly hopeful expression in his face:

"I have it," he said; "of course we do not yet know just what is being arranged for us, but I think we are safe in believing that we shall be allowed to go alone and not have any troublesome idiot of a guide to act as nurse."

Here Jack interrupted. "*Guide! guide!* Why I'd shoot any guide that dared come with us! We go alone or I'll be hanged if I go at all. We are not babies!"

"That's all right, Jack, my boy, don't get hot round the collar. Please remember you are a sort of invalid and that perhaps your father or the doctor will think you must not work too hard. There is no reason on earth why I, who am pretty husky, should not tackle the more strenuous jobs, at least until you regain your strength. I'll make you work then you may be sure, so if the guide question is brought up we must urge our point. But you are interrupting the even flow of my thoughts and words of wisdom, so shut up till I make my suggestion."

"Right you are, oh High and Mighty, we stand rebuked (get up, Evelyn) and bow to your august Majesty. Bow low, Evelyn, or he won't solve the vital problem and you will be left behind to cry your eyes out on the desert sands of the beach. Proceed, my Lord, we are all attention. Have we your permission to be seated?"

"Oh sit down, you silly idiot, and do shut up. I've almost forgotten what I wanted to say. Look here now: let us presume that we are allowed to go up where, who was it, Frank Stevens I think—yes, I am sure it was—said he had seen such a wonderful amount of beaver work up north of Rabbit Lake. He was after moose at the time and didn't bother much with the beaver. We can go by train and steamer for the first part and then go on with our canoe. I don't think it's more than three or four days' paddling from where the steamer drops us to where the best beaver country begins. If we have a decent sized canoe, say eighteen foot, we can carry enough supplies to last a very long time; after we had picked out a really good place, we could make a sort of permanent camp from which short trips could be taken. Your father cannot get away till some time in September. Why couldn't he then come up with your mother and Evelyn? We could meet them at the landing place and take them up to our camp, and we could all have a

glorious time for a month, or as long your father could stay. In this way Evelyn would have a bit of the fun, for I am sure they would not let her come with us alone."

"That's a jolly good idea," said Jack. "Let's go and tackle Dad now and see what he thinks of it. Oh I say, Evelyn, wouldn't this be fine!"

"Rather," said Evelyn, "half a loaf is better than no bread, and I would give all I own to have even a month with you two up there. It seems simply ages since I was off camping, and I do love being in the wild woods. The beaver would give us a wonderful excuse and object, and we would have the jolliest of times. Come on! Let's go and present our petition to the family."

No sooner said than done, and the three plotters hurried away to find their elders. After some searching they were found walking along the shore discussing plans for the boys' trip. Jack acting as spokesman launched the subject without loss of time:

"We have come," he said, "to ask you to consider our suggestions," and he briefly outlined the plan as they had arranged it. Mr. Sylvester, after listening carefully, agreed that it was an excellent idea and said that they had been puzzling over what to do with Evelyn but that this seemed a thoroughly satisfactory solution. He added that the boys

might as well plan to start the following week and that immediately after lunch they could make out a list of what was needed. "For I think," he said smiling, "you will need more than your beloved crooked knives and a wrecked launch for this trip."*

This is how the trip to Beaver-land originated, to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned. Mr. Pratt joined in the momentous after-lunch pow-wow, and of course added many useful and practical suggestions. The question of the canoe was an important one. If only one large canoe were taken, it would mean that any trips away from the main waterways would involve a lot of hard work as an eighteen-foot canoe is not easily carried through the timber-strewn forests, and the boys would undoubtedly want to visit many of the more isolated lakes and ponds. It is far easier for two persons to paddle one large canoe than for each to paddle his own; so the large one for the main journey would be best, especially as there would probably be rapids to pass. A small light canoe might possibly be towed up stream without much trouble, but in going down any rapids it would be dangerous and would therefore mean each boy taking charge of one. A fair-sized tent must be taken,

*Referring to the time when the boys were wrecked off the coast of Newfoundland, and were lost for a year.

also one small and very light for use on the side trips. No camp furniture was needed as the boys much preferred to make their own. A small saw and some nails were put on the list besides, of course, the inevitable two axes. Fishing tackle both for bass and trout was necessary and Charlie added sketching material as he was fond of painting and hoped to have plenty of opportunity of doing something in that line. A book on birds and the latest book on beaver were put on the list.

Nine days after the doctor had advised Jack's going off to the woods, the two boys started on their way north, equipped with everything necessary to make camp life comfortable, that is, all except the food supply, which was to be purchased in Canada in order to save carriage and duty. It was a cheerful little party at the North Station that stuffy July evening; Evelyn alone felt somewhat aggrieved that she was not going to be with the boys from the beginning; however, she consoled herself with the thought that the few weeks before her father could get away would soon pass. If all went well, they would meet again on the sixteenth of September, at the place where the steamer was to land the boys. A final good-bye and the heavy train puffed its noisy way out of the station and away from the sweltering city, carrying Charlie and Jack on the first stage of their journey to Beaver-land.

It can be readily understood that they were an excited couple, and it was long before they stopped talking and planning and sought the comforts of bed. The noise and dust of that hot train would soon be forgotten in the glorious quiet and sweet-scented, clean air of the woods. Over four months of happiness stretched out before them, and they went over to the land of Nod happy with wonderful thoughts of what the future had in store for them. Who is there that hasn't thought himself to sleep, tired out with the delicious work of building aërial castles? The largest and gamiest of fish always take the very flies we have brought; camp sites are perfect, fires don't smoke, dishes are washed by fairies, there is no drudgery, there are no mosquitoes or black flies, life is all joy, all sunshine and peace. Those castles remain in the air always *just* beyond our reach. We know we cannot reach the perfect place, but if we are optimists—and all others should be banished from our world—we go on hoping, and yet hoping, and so must it always be.

CHAPTER II

They arrive in Canada, make friends with the Hudson's Bay Company's Factor and start for the woods. Their first camp is on a delightful island.

IT WAS late the next day when the boys reached their railway destination. This was a small trading post, which we shall call Beaver Town, though that is not its real name, from which the steamer started on its occasional trips northward through lakes and rivers. By good luck the boat was expected to leave the following morning, so there was no time to be lost in getting together food and other things necessary for the trip. A visit to the Hudson's Bay Company's stores proved most interesting. There is a peculiar fascination in the very name of this great Company, whose exploits have been the subject of so many thrilling stories, and it always seems as though the Company was a thing of the past rather than a still existing organization whose influence is felt to-day in the wilder parts, even as in the days when the railways had not penetrated to the comparatively remote regions.

Both Jack and Charlie felt a strange sensation as they looked about the Company's store—a miniature department store it was, one that catered to the requirements of those who live in the wilds yet who demand certain luxuries. Standing alongside of a heap of steel traps was a sewing machine of the most modern pattern; here and there were highly ornate pieces of inartistic furniture, meant to appeal to some young couple contemplating marriage who felt that their pride could not be satisfied with any furniture that was not dazzlingly polished (with cheap varnish); from the ceiling hung bundles of snowshoes and moccasins and "gum" boots. Shelves were filled with really good blankets, for the shoddy blanket has no place in the life of those who must face the bitter winters of the North; then there were shelves of "store" suits and mackinaw coats, and fancy articles to suit the tastes of the young and fair of the land, rolls of gorgeously coloured oilcloth, stoves of all sorts of patterns, a couple of gramaphones, and even a small harmonium. The "show case" was filled with the strangest assortment imaginable: wonderful patent medicines, that cured (so the labels said) every ill to which the human flesh was heir, rested alongside of fishing tackle (which perhaps would be the cure of more ailments than the medicinal concoctions), knives,

cheap silver plate, very fancy sweets of startling, if not alluring, colours, vegetable seeds, mouth organs, warranted gold filled watches which sold for seven dollars and ninety-eight cents, with immense equally warranted gold filled chains "thrown in" to show good faith; in fact, there was scarcely anything that was not more or less represented in that marvellous collection, and the prices generally speaking were very moderate, while the quality of the really useful articles was invariably extremely good. It has always been the policy of the Hudson's Bay Company to treat squarely those on whom it depends for trade. The policy is sound for a poor blanket or defective boots might easily mean the loss of valuable skins.

Besides themselves there were but two customers in the store, one a more or less white man, who was sitting on a flour barrel laboriously reading an old newspaper and chewing a huge piece of tobacco in a most ostentatious manner. His face was of the worst possible type—small, deep-set eyes very close together, a sharp, somewhat hooked nose, which showed evidence of having been broken as it was very crooked; the mouth, more or less covered by a scraggy black moustache and sparse bristly beard, was of the cruel, thin-lipped, drooping type; evidence of Indian blood was distinctly visible in the high cheek bones, dark skin,

and straight hair which showed beneath his worn fur cap.

The other customer was an Indian, who was trying to make a bargain over a silver fox skin. This naturally interested the boys, who listened attentively to the quaintly expressed English of the Indian as he urged his views on the beauty and value of the skin he was showing. The storeman displayed a very mild interest; he took the pelt in his hand, blew the fur gently to see how thick it was, stated what he would give in cash or trade, sat back and picked his teeth thoughtfully. For many minutes no one spoke, then as the storeman decided to pay attention to the newcomers, and was about to move toward them, the Indian made what might be supposed to be a final effort to get a good price for his offering. "T'ree honded dollar, he dam good, eh!" but the storeman did not seem to hear him and came over to the boys to see what they wanted.

At this moment the half-breed left his flour barrel seat and walked over to where the storeman had stopped in front of the boys, and said he wanted a pair of good strong boot laces; having secured these he returned to his seat, while the Indian without change of expression carefully replaced the fox skin in a bag and walked out of the store, not even deigning to say good-bye.

"So long! Come again, Pete, when you get some sense in that fool head of yours," called out the storeman to the retreating figure; then turning to the boys he smilingly remarked, "he'll be back again to-morrow and sell that skin for two hundred. He asked a thousand when he first came in three days ago."

"What's it really worth?" Charlie asked

"A good seven hundred and fifty."

In the farther side of the shop the tobacco-chewing man kept his jaws still for a moment while his bead-like eyes peeped over the top of the newspaper. Seeing that Jack was observing him, he quickly returned to his tobacco and paper. As Charlie was explaining their needs, an elderly, white-haired man heard them and came forward, introducing himself as Mr. MacPherson, the Factor or head of the Company's trading post. He asked his young visitors to come into the office and began immediately to tell interesting stories of the days long past. He was an old man of Scotch birth who as a mere boy had come over to Canada, yet he still spoke with a strong Scotch accent. He told of the days when regular fleets of large bark canoes used to make their way down the rivers and lakes to the various trading posts, laden with the richest of furs, which were more often bartered than sold, and of his experiences when living in the most re-

mote outposts. The boys were so interested in his stories that they forgot almost to order the much-needed supplies. They told the old Factor of their intended trip and asked for suggestions as to where would be the best part of the country for them to go. He advised them to go up the lake by steamer to a certain landing place which was near the mouth of a fair-sized river. Taking a sheet of paper he made a rough map of the district and pointed out the best way for them to reach a series of small lakes where beaver were abundant and where there was the very best of country for camping. This was of course most helpful as also were his suggestions as to the food to be taken. He said they could easily take enough in the canoe for six weeks or two months and have another lot sent by steamer to the landing place to be picked up when they had an opportunity. This was sound advice which the boys were only too glad to accept. A list was soon made out and MacPherson promised to send on the duplicate outfit on a certain date unless he got word to the contrary. All the food was packed in boxes and bags of convenient size for handling and carrying, as there would be several portages to be made. It was late that evening when the boys bade the kind old Factor good-night, after a long-to-be-remembered evening of stories that were like pages of fiction.

Next morning Charlie and Jack were up in good time, and after breakfast went down to see the steamer and get their canoe and outfit put safely aboard. Mr. MacPherson came to see them off and wish them good luck. Loafing about the landing place, Jack noticed the evil-looking white man who had been in the store the previous day, and asked the old Factor who the man was.

"A miserable good-for-nothing who is always getting into trouble—sometimes a trapper and sometimes a lumber man, that is, when he is not in jail. His name is William Marchand, commonly called 'Sneaky Bill.' Well he deserves the name, for a dirtier, low-down skunk doesn't live."

"He certainly looks the part. He'd make a nice, pleasant guide, wouldn't he?" Jack replied.

"He tried that some years ago, but his attempts ended in disaster, and only by good luck he escaped being hanged for murder. He took an American named Roy Alister out after moose; the man was very rich and very foolish, for he carried quite a lot of money about with him besides a very expensive outfit. Some weeks later Sneaky Bill returned alone with a queer story of having lost the American while out one night tracking a wounded moose. From that day to this nothing has been heard of the unfortunate man. There was absolutely no direct evidence of crime, though we all had our

suspicions. Bill was carefully watched, but he was too clever to spend any unusual amount of money he might have had for many months. One day he passed this place saying he had had great luck with foxes and had caught four beauties and was taking them further east to dispose of; on his way he met a travelling fur dealer and sold him the skins, so he said. But luck was with the rascal, for the man was drowned by the upsetting of his canoe. All evidence of the transaction was completely lost, and Bill went off on a prolonged debauch which lasted until he had squandered every cent of his ill-gotten money. So you see he is a nice sort of chap to avoid."

"Well, I don't think we want him for a guide anyway," said Charlie.

"You couldn't have him, even if you wished, as he is not allowed to act as guide any more!"

The sudden call of "all aboard" brought the conversation to an abrupt end, and the boys jumped aboard after thanking MacPherson for his kindness to them. A few minutes later and the steamer, with as much fuss as a transatlantic mail boat, left the dock and started on her way up the long lake. Several times during the warm summer afternoon landings were made and cargo discharged at the small settlements. Toward evening, as the shadows lengthened, the little steamer tied

up for the night, getting under way again the following morning after breakfast. At 10:30 the captain pointed out the river, which was about half a mile from the landing they were about to make. Less than half an hour later the canoe was in the water and safely loaded with all the outfits of tent, blankets, food and clothes, ready for the wonderful holiday that was to last more than four months. Charlie, being the stronger, took the stern paddle, and Jack the bow, and at last, with a cheery good-bye from the people at the landing, who had arranged to take care of letters and supplies for the boys, the graceful green canoe started for the river.

The day fortunately was fine. Only a slight summer breeze disturbed the smooth surface of the lake, and this breeze was a fair one, so the easy half mile was soon covered. On arriving at the river the paddling became more strenuous, for the current was against them and fairly swift. Charlie had the burden of the work on his shoulders, as poor Jack was far too weak to do heavy paddling.

"Don't strain yourself, Jack," Charlie called out, "take it as easy as you can; I'll get along all right; we need not do more than a few miles to-day, and by sticking close to the bank we can take advantage of the dead water."

"Right you are. I certainly do not seem to have much strength these days. But, I say, won't

it be fun coming down this river? That's a fine old current in the middle—wouldn't need much paddling, would it?"

The river was about eighty yards wide and quite deep; the bank was low and very heavily timbered; farther up, where the river narrowed, it ran through more hilly country, consequently the current was much more swift and progress became increasingly slow and difficult. After going a couple of hours they came to where the waters broadened out and became less rapid. Charlie, however, was so tired that he proposed a rest.

"Why not camp here? It looks like a decent sort of place," Jack replied.

The suggestion was entirely satisfactory. Charlie immediately steered the canoe into a little back-water which formed a delightful, well wooded island. A better camping site could not have been asked for. The ground was a mass of ferns, flowers, and grass under the shade of large birches, whose rough, untidy bark blew about in the gentle breeze; sweet scented balsams added their touch of deep blue-green colour; alders fringed the island, growing large on the dead water side, while smaller ones shivered in the swift current on the river bank. "A regular paradise" was Jack's verdict, and so it was. As soon as they had landed and looked over the ground Charlie shouldered the reins of government.

"Squat down there on the soft side of that log, Jack, and take things easy, while I get the stuff out of the canoe and make camp; you look like the last rows of tomatoes after the frost has touched them up."

"Oh hang it, I can help a bit. I'm not going to let you do all the work, even if you do think yourself the great and only strong man."

"No back talk now, and no insubordination, young fellow, my lad," Charlie replied; "I am appointed your boss, nurse, guide and general factotum by your own father and mother, and what they sez, I does, so there. Later on, when you are strong again, we will change places and I'll take one grand loaf while you earn an honest living for both of us by the perspiration of your manly brow. Now come along and hold that seat down. It's getting late and I have lots to do."

Jack, seeing that arguing was useless and feeling more tired than he cared to admit, sat on the log while Charlie began unloading the boat. The outfit had been so arranged that only a couple of bags had to be opened, one containing the little light shelter tent and blankets, the other the cooking utensils and a small supply of grub. The rest of the load was stacked up on shore and covered with a large ground sheet in case of rain, while the canoe was drawn up on the bank and turned upside down.

It seemed rather an unnecessary amount of work, but leaving a loaded canoe in the water all night is risky; a moose might crash into it, or a log be blown against the frail craft, or, again, a heavy rain would soon fill the canoe; so it is always safer to put it carefully on shore during the night. As soon as Charlie had made the outfit secure he cut a couple of saplings and put up the shelter tent, then he collected sufficient fuel and with the aid of some birch bark started a good fire in front of a large green back log. A cross bar from which the pots could be hung was then put in position. While the fire was burning, he cut enough balsam boughs for the beds, for, as he said, one might as well be comfortable even though it were only for a single night. Within an hour from the time of landing the temporary camp was completed and as it was then nearly six o'clock it was decided to start getting dinner ready. This was soon done, and the two boys thoroughly enjoyed their first camp meal since leaving Newfoundland.

"Rather a different sort of meal from the last we cooked, isn't it?" remarked Jack. "Do you remember our makeshift devices up there at Beaver Stream Camp?"

"Indeed I do: the old spatter-dock roots, dried caribou, smoked salmon and all; seems like a dream, doesn't it? And here we have these delicious

slap jacks made with dried eggs and milk! What wouldn't we have given for these luxuries in those months of economical housekeeping! But, after all, it really was fun."

"You bet it was. Do you remember our famous Christmas dinner? Let's see, we had broiled salmon, ptarmigan and spatter dock."

"Yes, and some of our precious milk chocolate and biscuits, with blue-berries and that awful acorn coffee, which we thought so good. This is just a little better," Charlie remarked as he poured out another cup of real coffee.

"Oh, I say, Charlie, do you remember that fine bow you gave me on Christmas morning and how we both tried to surprise each other! It was certainly sport!"

"Doesn't it seem queer how one only remembers the interesting and nice things that happened, all the disagreeable parts have faded away. Yet we had some ticklish moments, especially during that awful snowstorm, when we so nearly got lost. Didn't we bless that old broken shack with its gruesome inhabitant. Poor old chap, what a dreary death." For some time the two sat in silence, staring at the fire and thinking of all they had gone through during that eventful year.

"I wonder whether, after all, we shall have as much fun out of this carefully planned trip as we

did on that very accidental one. Frankly I rather doubt it, as we shall be almost too comfortable, and everything will be too easy."

"For goodness' sake don't grumble, Charlie, at having things comfortable. Let's enjoy it all and I'll bet we have a simply corking time and will both kick like steers when the day comes for us to return."

"You're right," Charlie replied. "We certainly ought to have all kinds of fun, and no worries, and not too much work. Speaking of work, let's get busy with the washing up. Of course we shall enjoy that, eh?"

"Well, that's a job I confess I would willingly hand over to someone else. I've always thought that it was the one thing for which a guide was useful, and even ornamental; I simply love to watch *them* doing it. I wish some clever person would invent some way of camping with nothing to wash up. It would be a great advance in the cause of civilization."

"What an ungrateful dog you are, Jack. I remember the time when we wished we had had cups, plates, and pots and pans to wash, to say nothing of nice soap to do it with. Why, man, we should consider this job a positive luxury instead of complaining and grumbling like a pair of soldiers, a fine pair we are. We must be tired, I expect.

Let's get the beastly job done and turn in. I had thought of going fishing to see if I could not get something for breakfast, but honestly I am far more anxious to turn in."

"Them's my sentiments exactly, Charlie my boy." Suiting the action to the words they soon had everything clean and tidy. Charlie had cut enough wood for the morning and a large piece of birch bark was put in the tent to keep dry in case of rain. It was still daylight when they sought the comfortable bough beds, but they were sound asleep long before the setting sun painted the sky a glorious gold. Not a cloud marred the golden dome and no wind stirred the trees whose deepening purple tops cut sharply against the luminous background of slowly fading colours. From among the dark woodland shadows came the sweet soul-stirring song of the hermit thrushes calling to one another or to the souls of those who had already lived their lives in those mysterious woods.

CHAPTER III

Journey up river is resumed; they catch some bass, see moose, and make camp in time to get shelter from severe thunder storm.

MORNING broke clear and still. The dew-drenched leaves hung in listless profusion and sparkled like jewels in the rays of the rising sun. The white-throated sparrows called repeatedly "Sleepy boy, sleepy boy, sleepy boy, rise," but the boys were slow to answer, sleep holding them willing captives. Not till nearly seven o'clock did they bestir themselves, after much yawning and stretching. Why hurry when the whole summer and autumn lay before them? But appetites had to be satisfied and that meant that a fire must be lighted and food cooked; so Charlie built the fire and put the water on to boil and then went to the river bank and enjoyed a brief dip in the cold water. Jack had to be more careful and contented himself with a meagre wash on the edge, not daring to get entirely into the river.

Soon after breakfast the canoe was launched and

packed, and once more the young travellers started on their way to the unknown woods and lakes. Two hours of easy paddling brought them to a tract of flat land where the river broadened out into a lake about half a mile in width and several miles long. They had not gone far before a large swirl in the water close to the canoe attracted their attention and decided the boys to try their luck fishing. A rod was quickly assembled and a small spoon with a bunch of red and white feathers was used as bait. Any fish that wanted to be caught must take hold without delay, as the wind was rising and the journey must be continued while the paddling was still fairly easy. Therefore trolling was the only available method. For nearly half an hour nothing happened; then the canoe was allowed to slow down slightly as the boys wanted to watch a large cow moose that was walking along the edge of the lake followed by a very small red calf. Suddenly the rod was jerked nearly out of the boat and before Charlie could grab it the line was spinning from the singing reel. Scarcely had he checked the line than a splendid big bass leaped from the water.

"By Jove, he's a beauty, Charlie!" Jack called out as he swung the bow of the canoe round so that his companion could the more easily play the lively fish. Lively it certainly was! Not once, but seven

"Sleepy boy—sleepy boy—sleepy boy, a-r-i-s-e," the morning song of the white-throated sparrow

times the powerful black bass leaped in the air scattering the glistening drops of water and bending the rod to a dangerous degree, each time vigorously shaking its head in its efforts to dislodge the hook. The tackle held and in a minute after the last jump it was safely in the canoe—a good three and a half pound bass.

The moose in the meantime had been watching the boys with keen interest, evidently wondering what the strange creatures might be. A gust of wind happened just then to blow in her direction from the canoe. That settled the question beyond any doubt. Enemies of the worst kind, nothing less, indeed, than human beings. The very sort

The powerful black bass leaped in the air, scattering the glistening drops of water and bending the rod to a dangerous degree

that had killed her mate when the golden leaves had last fallen. Well she remembered that memorable night. They were standing together. It was the sacred love season and they thought that only the autumn moon could see them. Then without any warning a tongue of fire darted out from the shadows, followed by a sharp report louder than the loudest crack of a frost-rift tree. Her splendid mate rose with a scream of pain, threw his wonderful antlered head back and crushed to the ground *dead*. Then two men came out into the burnt clearing and she dashed away fearful that a similar fate might overtake her.

Human beings were things of terror and her

young calf must be protected from them, so the frightened moose left her lunch unfinished and splashed out of the lake and into the dense woods followed closely by the little red calf. Instantly both were lost to view.

"Doesn't appear to trust us very much," Jack remarked.

"You're right, but I suppose it's no wonder. I say, did you notice what a curious colour the calf was, quite red. Somehow I always imagined that young moose were spotted like the deer."

"I also had a sort of idea that they were. Certainly I remember seeing that stated in some book we had. Don't you remember we looked it up in another book which only said that they were red during the first summer, but made no mention of the spots, and we wondered at the time which was right?"

"Yes, I remember that, Jack, but there is no doubt about this particular calf, it certainly had no spots. We must look out for another so as to be sure. Funny what mistakes one finds in books. To change the subject, isn't this a fine bass? That means a good meal for us."

"A good meal for *you*, you mean, with that grand appetite of yours. Personally I think we should try for another fish so that we can both have enough, for I am feeling as hollow as an empty

barrel, and have no very great desire to share one miserable sardine with you or any one else. So chuck out that iniquitous weapon again and let us proceed, not too fast either, for you saw that we got nothing until we slowed down to look at old Mrs. Moose."

In a short time another bass was hooked and landed, after a pretty good fight. It was somewhat smaller than the first but still a respectable size.

"Are you satisfied now, Jack, or do you think I shall devour both of these fish?"

"They ought to give us enough for a meal, I suppose, so let's get along. This breeze seems to be increasing and we might as well get clear of the lake before it makes paddling any more difficult."

"Right you are," Charlie replied. "We'll shove along as fast as we can, but don't overdo it or you will crock up and then I'll have the whole job on my dainty hands. Ding, ding, full speed ahead."

The canoe quickly responded to the steady paddling and made such good headway against the rising wind, that inside of an hour they once more entered the river. Owing to the comparative flatness of the country the stream was almost sluggish so that notwithstanding the head breeze the boys made their way at good speed, and without too much exertion. In some places there were stretches of swampy backwater which looked as though they

might contain beaver, but no traces of any lodges were visible. Two moose were seen feeding among the lily pads but they took little notice of the canoe so long as it kept moving along. When it stopped they kept their curious ill-shapen heads out of the water, nor would they resume feeding until the boat began to move forward again. The boys made no attempt to stalk the animals as the canoe was rather heavily loaded and paddling among the grass and lily leaves was hard work.

Now and then a family of mergansers scurried along the water in an amusing way. The mother bird, realizing that her youngsters could not fly, swam ahead with wings flapping the water. The ducklings did the same with their little unfledged wings and went along at a remarkable speed. For some time they kept straight ahead of the canoe, but, as the chase promised to be a long one, they made a sudden bolt to the right and were soon lost among the long grass that fringed the shore.

"Some day we must try to catch one of the little beggars and see what it looks like," said Charlie.

"It would be fun but I imagine they will take some catching, so we will choose a day when the canoe is not loaded, if you please, Mr. Strongman. Just now I think we should be looking for a suitable place to camp, for honestly I am too tired to go much farther."

"Put down your paddle, Jack; I can manage well enough and we will go ashore at the first decent looking place we can find. We've done a good enough day's work, anyhow, and I am so blessed tired that I shall be only too glad to start making camp. You see that knoll right ahead of us, where the river begins to narrow down? Looks as though it might offer us its hospitality, doesn't it?"

Jack looked ahead for a few minutes before answering.

"Why, I believe there is a stream coming into the main river, just to the left of the wooded knoll. I am almost sure I can see a little waterfall."

Charlie took out the glasses and looked at the place which was only about three quarters of a mile ahead.

"Right you are. There is a stream; it seems very small and where it joins the river I think there is a sor tof modified waterfall; anyhow, there is white water."

In less than half an hour they reached the knoll, and found a delightful place for making camp. The stream came tumbling down among a pile of large rocks which formed the bottom of a narrow valley whose sides were densely covered with a close second growth of spruces, with here and there a gaunt, partly dead pine towering above the vigorous younger growth. Toward the upper slope

of the right side of the valley the fresh greens of the beeches showed a hard wood ridge edged against the dark green of the conifers and continuing for some considerable distance away from the river. The knoll which had first attracted the attention of the young explorers was on the right of the stream, and was very little higher than the surrounding ground. The dense clumps of spruces and firs had given the appearance of far greater height.

A convenient landing place was soon found, and as on the previous evening Charlie insisted that Jack should rest while he started the work of getting the camp made.

"Charlie, let's have our grub first and then you'll certainly feel better able to do the work. We can quickly boil some water for coffee and fry a bit of bacon. It would taste jolly good, wouldn't it?"

"Perhaps you are right. I'll go over to those birches and get some bark and we'll make a small quick fire."

This was rapidly accomplished and within a few minutes some beautiful clear water from the brook was boiling over the blaze. The meal was a light one, as the boys kept the two fish which were to be used for dinner, and Charlie was anxious to get the camp ready in case of rain.

Dark thunder clouds were looming up in a threatening way so there was no time to be lost. Jack

was forced to give up his rest until later as there was so much to be done. At last the small tent was pitched and dry boughs cut ready for the beds. By this time the wind had dropped completely and the air was heavy and hot. The sky became darker and darker, of that curious purple-blue that warns us of trouble.

"Dirty work at the crossroads to-night, I'm thinking," Charlie remarked, as he mopped his dripping brow. Wood cutting was hard work under the conditions. But a fire would be needed and there was no knowing how long the storm would last.

A rustling of the leaves on the tree tops announced the advance guard, then silence again and a threatening stillness. Another gust, and yet another, each of increasing violence. The sky flashed bright erratic lights to the distant accompaniment of the celestial artillery. Still no rain. It would only be a question of minutes now before the floodgates would open, but the two boys had everything ready for it. Under the upturned canoe the outfit was securely placed safe from even the hardest rain. Mosquitoes began to sing their annoying songs as they attacked in full force. A smudge would have been useful but there had been no time to make one and anyhow the rain would soon come in sufficient force to extinguish any

smudge. At last the first heavy drops of rain came pelting down and the two boys promptly took cover. Faster and faster and harder and harder the drops came; then, with a terrific crash the storm burst, such thunder as the boys had never heard, while lightning darted about the leaden sky throwing its fiery darts first in one direction then in another. The wind increased to a gale and the rain to a deluge. But the tiny tent kept it out and as they sat under its shelter both Charlie and Jack enjoyed thoroughly the wonderful display of nature's bad temper.

It was well they had not been caught on the lake in such a storm. Jack was commenting on their good luck in being so comfortable, as he rubbed some "dope" on the back of his neck to discourage the attentions of the mosquitoes, when Charlie interrupted him:

"I wonder what will be the chance of picking a trout or two out of the stream after this storm passes. I vote we have a try."

"It might be worth trying," Jack replied, "and if the trout bite as willingly as these confounded mosquitoes do we ought to have some good sport."

Fortunately the storm passed as rapidly as it had come and soon the afternoon sun was shining clean and clear on the well-washed country.

There was no time lost in assembling a couple of

light rods. Ibis, Parmachenee Belle, and Montreal were the flies selected. Jack started fishing in the pool below the little falls while Charlie tried his luck lower down where the brook shot its foaming water into the quiet river. During the first half hour only two rises rewarded the most careful casting. Jack who felt the results did not justify so much hard work, left the falls and came down to where Charlie was standing on a partly submerged flat rock a few feet from the bank.

"I am afraid that beastly thunder storm has knocked out the fishing instead of making it good. I only had one small half-hearted rise. What luck have you had?"

"Nothing so far, at least nothing but one rise. It was a good fish, too, but he wouldn't——" Just then there was a fine splash and the rod bent almost into the water. Taking the line freely the fish made for the rapid water in midstream and the current helped it to carry the line out at an alarming rate. But Charlie was no novice and he skillfully steered the fish into the quieter water and a few minutes later landed a fine three-pound trout. This encouraged Jack to return to his place. But he only caught two small ones during the next hour, and Charlie did not even get another rise.

As it was about time to begin thinking about dinner they gave up fishing. Luck had been bad

but they had secured enough for breakfast and as Charlie remarked with a smile, "that saves our bacon."

After enjoying a thoroughly satisfactory meal of fried bass and other delicacies, the two were quickly stretched out in their bough beds watching the ever fascinating log fire which crackled and spluttered, while the blue smoke drifted lazily upward toward the glowing evening sky.

The surrounding woods were getting more and more beautiful as the light grew less. There are few things more wonderful than the woods on an absolutely calm evening. Not a leaf stirred in all that forest. The birds of the North were saying good-night to each other. Here and there a red quirrel chattered as though objecting to something. Occasionally a sudden *whirrr* drowned all other sounds as a ruffed grouse flew to his sleeping place in a tree to be safe from the prowling lynx or fox. The mysterious owls left their roosts and came forth to hunt for their breakfast. Like pale ghosts they came, noiseless as shadows, but quick and keen to spot any unfortunate hare, or squirrel, or other item of their bill of fare.

For some time conversation had ceased. It was one of the occasions when talk is unnecessary, there was so much to see and hear, beyond one's own voice. A sudden snort startled the boys

for it sounded so very near. Beyond the smoke of the fire something moved, and it was something large. Then it took a step to one side and the boys saw a doe staring at them with her great eyes. Two large ears were pointed forward to catch the slightest sound. For perhaps a minute she stood motionless. Then a burning log slipped and sent up a shower of sparks. The doe gave a terrified snort and bolted, displaying her large white banner conspicuously as she disappeared into the darkening woods.

CHAPTER IV

Have fine trout fishing: meet two Indians, who give them information; strike the trail to the beaver country; reach Four Island Lake; discover a large dam; make permanent camp; see many moose.

THE day dawned hazy and beautiful. Near the water all was lost in the pearly mist, above which the sun kissed tree-tops hung as though suspended in mid air. The scent of the dampened woods was intoxicatingly sweet to the boys who, filled with the joy of living, sat down to their breakfast of fried trout.

As soon as camp was struck an hour was devoted to fishing, and wonderful fishing it was. Enough trout were caught to furnish food for the next three meals. Then the journey was resumed as the mists began to melt away under the power of the summer sun. On rounding a sharp bend in the river a couple of hours later a canoe was sighted coming swiftly down stream. This proved to be a fine bark canoe paddled by two Indians, who, on seeing the strangers drew in close to the bank hailing the

boys with the simple greeting of "Mornin', you got tabac?" Jack replied that they had none, for which he was very sorry.

"You no smoke?" asked the Indian in the stern.

"No, not yet, we are not old enough," Jack said.

"Ugh! where you go?"

"To fish and to look for beaver."

"No let catch de beaver now."

"We know that, but we want only to see them and their houses."

This seemed to puzzle the two Indians, who discussed the matter with each other in their own language.

"You find plenty beaver up dere," pointing in a northwesterly direction.

"How far?" Charlie asked.

"Oh, 'bout two day in river, den find no much big lac, and you portage long side leetle river dis side, no plenty far. You see plenty lac and he got plenty beaver an' big moose."

This sounded very hopeful, and Charlie thanked the good-natured Indian and asked where they were going with their load of furs. It appeared that they had been travelling by canoe and portage for nearly a month with their valuable winter's haul of northern skins, all neatly done up in convenient bundles. There were fox, mink, lynx, wolverine, martin, otter, and the humble mus-

quash which was now becoming of greater value every day. The boat-load represented the long, hard winter's work for these trappers, in return for which they would soon receive money and supplies. No wonder they were good natured and happy! Knowing how fond they are of sweets, Charlie handed a bar of chocolate to the Indians who immediately sampled it with keen appreciation. Then saying "so long," they pushed out into the stream on their way toward their destination and the fulfilment of their hopes.

"By Jove! I wish we had a canoe like that one. Isn't it a beauty," Charlie remarked, as the graceful craft of birch bark slipped over rather than through the water without sound or splash.

"So do I! What's the chance of our being able to pick one up somewhere? Let's ask the next Indian we meet."

"It would be a splendid idea. The only trouble is the Indians seem so dashed scarce round these parts. I wonder if the place that chap told us of for beaver is the same that Mr. MacPherson marked on the sketch. Let's look at it. You have the sketch in your pocket, I think."

A glance at the rough sketch proved that the places were almost identical, but the Indian's route to the chain of lakes was different. According to MacPherson's instructions they should pass

through the medium sized lake and about a mile beyond they would find a blazed trail starting from a very large dead pine which stood in a small back water. The government survey map was then consulted and the stream spoken of by the Indian was found. By following the government map, the ponds were about two miles from the lake; whereas the blazed trail was apparently quite half a mile shorter; so it was decided to stick to the blazed trail.

The day passed without any particular excitement. Occasionally deer and moose were seen and one moose, a young bull, allowed them to approach to within about ten yards before moving off. His horns, only partly grown, were small and of course in the velvet. Camp was not made till fairly late in the afternoon as both boys were anxious to reach beaver country as soon as possible. Fortunately Jack was already feeling the benefit of the outdoor life and was able to render a fair amount of help in paddling. It was late the following day when the "no much big lac" was passed and the beginning of the blazed trail was found after some little difficulty. Camp was made and the two very tired boys lost no time in getting their meal and seeking the welcome comfort of the rather hastily made beds.

Bright and early next morning the young ex-

plorers were up and immediately after breakfast they started. Charlie shouldered a good load and Jack a light one. The trail had evidently been blazed within the last two years as the gum scars on the trees were but slightly overgrown by bark. Not much had been done in the way of clearing the path which was strewn with many fallen trees. These obstructions had to be cleared away before the canoe and heavier loads could be carried to the ponds. This occupied a good deal of time but gave Jack plenty of opportunity to rest on the way. Under the conditions it was difficult to get an accurate idea of the distance and it was about two hours before the first gleam of water was seen through the closely growing trees. Soon after that the trail led down a fairly steep bank to the edge of a small lake, in which were several tiny wooded islands. The eastern shore ran up to high, very heavily timbered land surmounted by a hard wood ridge. The western side was flat, and more or less marshy.

"Let's go over to the left and see where the Indian's stream would have led us," Charlie suggested, after they had rested a few minutes. Jack also was anxious to see it, as well as explore for what might be found in the way of a good, permanent camp. About four hundred yards from the blazed trail they came to an outlet stream which was evidently the one referred to by the Indian.

"Why, here is a dam!" Jack called out. "Quite a decent one, too, and apparently in use."

True enough the outlet from the lake was restricted by a dam about a hundred yards across, and quite high in the centre.

"Oh, I say, Jack, isn't it a beauty? Pretty good luck I call it, striking beaver work immediately we arrive."

While examining the structure the sound of something splashing in the grassy swamp on the left caused both boys to glance up quickly. At first nothing could be seen, then Charlie climbed a few feet up a leaning birch tree.

"Come up quickly, Jack," he called excitedly, in a loud whisper. Jack replied in person and as he reached his companion he saw no less than five moose feeding in the shallow water, and beyond them a deer. What a wonderful picture it made! But there was a lot to be done and after watching the big animals for five or six minutes Charlie suggested that he had better go back to the river and carry up the canoe, while Jack could select a good site and get it cleared up ready for the camp. Jack did not altogether agree to this; he thought it would be better to go back with Charlie and help to bring up some of the outfit; then when they had the canoe it would be better to explore the neighbourhood before making a more or less permanent camp.

The beginning of the dam; branches are first laid lengthways with the stream, then sod is added to hold back the water

But on the whole this seemed the better plan. So together they started back along the blazed trail which they christened MacPherson's trail, and were surprised to find how short it really was. Going empty-handed, however, is different from struggling under heavy loads; later on, when poor Charlie stumbled along under the weight of the supposedly light canoe, he was convinced the trail must be at least ten miles long, though in reality it was a short mile and a half. On arriving at the lake Jack felt decidedly too tired to make another trip. Charlie left him to start a fire and get some food ready while he went off down the trail, to return in little more than an hour with a good full load of

A large and comparatively new beaver dam more than three hundred feet in length

food. "Food is bad stuff to leave behind; it appeals too strongly to too many different kinds of creatures."

Jack had a good meal ready and waiting for him which vanished with the peculiar speed noticeable when healthy boys are out in the woods. After a comfortable rest Charlie returned to what he called the pack-horse job while Jack put up a temporary camp. Three trips he made before evening and he was thoroughly tired out so that he tumbled into the blankets immediately after supper, and a good supper it was for Jack had caught half a dozen nice trout, all over half a pound. The fact that there was good fishing to be had in the lake

was a source of great satisfaction as it helped to solve the question of food for the summer if they decided to stay there.

It was a sleepy pair of boys that tried hard to wake up next morning. The previous day had been pretty strenuous and it was late before they finally crawled out of the blankets. After breakfast the canoe was put in the water and a tour of investigation began. First the little islands were examined. There were four of these, the largest not more than seventy yards in length. All were wooded, and the most easterly one was found to contain a large beaver house. It was made on the edge of the water and apparently was occupied, as several freshly peeled sticks were floating close by. In the lake a pair of loons were seen swimming about, occasionally uttering their weird cry which sounded almost like the tremulous call of an insane person. From the excited behaviour of the birds they evidently had a nest somewhere in the neighbourhood, presumably on one of the islands, and Jack suggested that they should make a search for it as soon as they had time.

The most important thing now was to find the best place for their camp. As already mentioned, the easterly side of the lake was swampy. On closer examination the easterly side was found to be

a regular net-work of water trails, made apparently by both beaver and muskrats. Two streams ran through the swamp. As the boys pushed the canoe very gently up the larger and more northerly of the two they disturbed several muskrats sunning themselves on the bank. Just as they entered the large shallow pond from which the sluggish stream ran, a pair of ducks flew up with a vigorous quacking that sounded strangely loud in the quiet of the summer morning. The sound unfortunately startled two moose that were feeding in the water scarcely fifty yards from the canoe. They took one look at the intruders, then turned and bolted with as much noise and splashing as a sternwheel steamer.

"Confound those beastly ducks! If it had not been for them we would have had a fine chance to watch the moose," Jack exclaimed in a disgusted tone.

"Never mind," Charlie replied; "it's perhaps just as well, because we would have spent a whole lot of time watching the creatures, when we really should be getting along with our job. The moose seem so common about here that we shall have ample opportunity of seeing them under all sorts of conditions. It will be great fun hiding in these shallow ponds in the evenings and watching the various animals and birds. There doesn't seem to be anything especially interesting in the way of

camping ground in this swamp. Let's pull out and continue along the edge of the lake."

They were very quickly in the lake again and continuing their way found another small stream running into it a short distance beyond the beaver lodge island. They decided not to explore this brook but proceeded to where the main stream emptied itself into what they agreed to call Four Island Lake. This stream was so narrow and crooked that paddling was out of the question, so Charlie took the pole and with some difficulty forced the light craft against the current. The west bank was low and more or less covered with alders. Farther back the ground rose very gradually and for some little distance was open grass and scrub, with clumps of larch, birch, and spruces dotted about. The east bank rose gradually toward the high ridge with its crest of pale green beeches and maples. After a few hundred yards of hard poling another lake was entered; it was about five hundred yards long, and narrow. Standing up in the canoe, Charlie could see still another pond ahead and he suggested that it might be well to go ashore and climb a suitable tree and so get a general view of the country. This sounded like a good plan and was immediately put into effect. After going a short distance up the steep bank they came to a crooked maple which was easily climbed. The view thus

obtained was a delightful surprise. As far as they could see to the north and west there was a succession of ponds and lakes. Unlimited opportunities for exploring and evidently an ideal country for beaver.

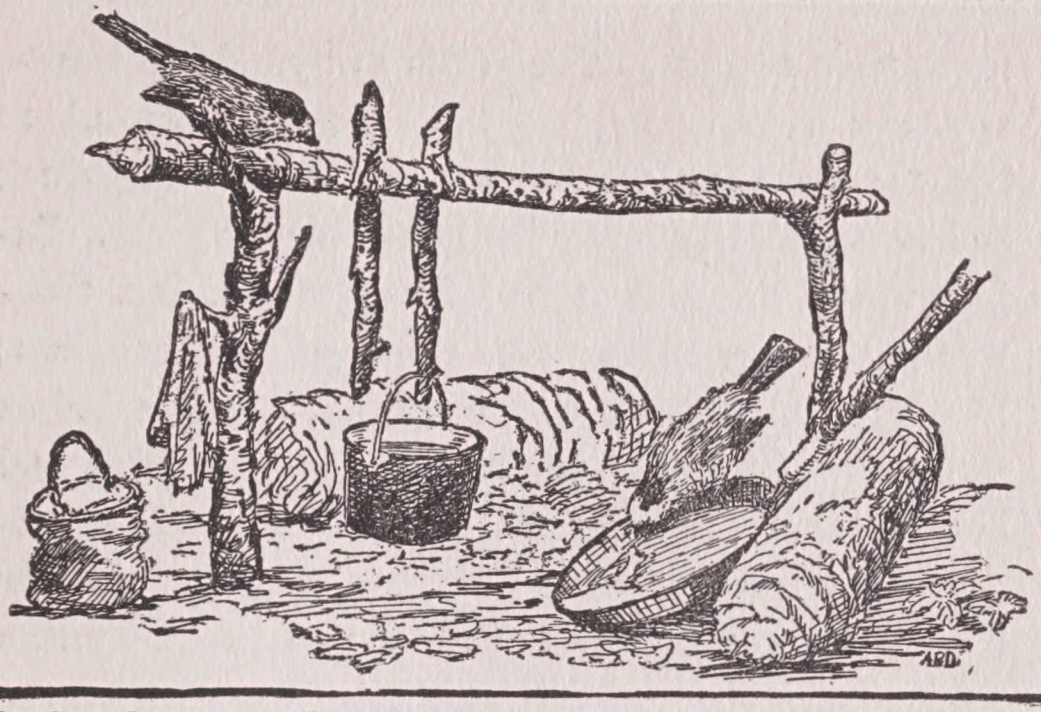
Having looked over the situation, Jack suggested going back to Four Island Lake and making their camp on the wooded side, where he was sure they would find a suitable place. After a careful search they decided on a site near the edge of a tiny stream of beautiful clear water which came tumbling down among the boulders from the high hardwood ridge. There was a small patch of fairly even ground with large trees about, so that abundant firewood could be procured without difficulty. The work of clearing the place occupied but a short time; then all the outfit was brought over from the trail, and the larger tent pitched so that it opened toward the lake. Some birch bark was peeled and a shelter made for the dining "room," while the reserve of stores was put in the small shelter tent to be out of the way. Stones gathered from the brook were used for making a substantial fireplace.

While they were at work their first visitors arrived: a pair of Canada jays; later a red squirrel came and perched himself on a nearby tree and gave the intruders a good scolding. The making of a table and seats was postponed till later as Jack

Four Island Camp, where the boys lived for several months

was very tired and suggested a little fishing by way of relaxation. Charlie, nothing loth, put his rod together and the two went out in the canoe. It was scarcely late enough in the afternoon when they started so for some time they had very little luck. Then they moved to the head of the lake and tried the inlet. Here things went better and within an hour or so enough trout had been caught to last for three meals. As there was no sense in catching more they returned to camp and prepared a good solid meal, after which they went off to the shallow pool where the moose had been seen that morning.

This time the boys approached with the utmost



The Canada jays, well named "camp robbers," took care that no food was wasted

caution; instead of going up the stream they took the course through the tall grass which acted as a screen. It was slow work as the paddles could not be used. Instead they caught hold of the grass and pulled their way along. Something was heard splashing about occasionally in the open water ahead. As the boys listened intently, trying to make out just where the sound came from, there was a singing whirr of wings and a duck passed within a few feet of their heads. The duck passed like a flash, then swung round and twice made the circle of the pond to make sure there was no danger. Strangely enough the presence of the canoe was not discovered for it finally alighted in the water not

more then ten or twelve yards away. Needless to say the two crouching boys scarcely dared to breathe as they watched the unsuspecting duck swimming slowly away into the thicker grass. Before many minutes it had disappeared, but there was still every reason to be exceedingly cautious; nearly half an hour was allowed to elapse before they moved forward again. The long waiting had been interesting, however, as the busy little muskrats were continually passing to and fro, usually carrying grass or what looked like roots. Often they would stop within two or three feet of the canoe and stare enquiringly at the green craft. As it did not move their suspicions were allayed and they would pass on, probably wondering what new form of thing had come to dwell in their midst. At last it seemed safe for the boys to move forward again and in a few minutes they were within sight of the pool in the middle of which stood a very large bull moose with the water half way up his body. He was complacently munching the stems of spatterdock leaves. As he finished a mouthful he put his head completely under water for fully a minute and then brought up another bunch of leaves. What little breeze there was fortunately blew toward the canoe, so the boys were able to watch the big unsuspecting beast as long as they wished, without fear of detection so long as they

remained absolutely quiet. The moose's ungainly head carried a pair of very large, thick horns which looked almost like huge cactus leaves; no conspicuous points protruded as yet from the palmation, all of which was thickly covered with the membrane commonly called velvet. This gives a most uncouth appearance to what later would be handsome horns, or antlers, as they are more properly called.

The horns start to grow early in the spring and for some time are simply little knobs of soft dark skin of most curious texture and very sensitive to injury. All summer the growth continues, until the full size is attained with the approach of autumn. Then the velvet begins to dry up and gradually peels off. During this period the moose is usually shy and nervous, as though he resents being seen in such an untidy state. The antlers are in prime condition, hard and well polished, by the time the mating season arrives and their owner is ready to do battle with any of his kind and sex on the slightest provocation. The mating season having passed, the moose has no further use for the cumbersome head-gear so he sheds it with the coming of winter.

For fully half an hour Charlie and Jack watched the large animal with intense interest, and during the time they saw two beaver swimming across the

pond, but they were too far away to be seen distinctly in the waning light. The sun had set some time before and the glow of the gorgeous twilight transformed the pond into a pool of gold against which loomed the bulk of the moose almost black by contrast. Deciding that it was better not to disturb or frighten the big beast the canoe was quietly moved through the grass, back to the lake and to camp.

CHAPTER V

The happenings in Beaver Town; Bebé the dog—a midnight tragedy; Sneaky Bill makes temporary escape and does a deal in silver fox skins; the fire; Pete sells the fox skins; kind treatment by the Hudson's Bay Factor. The police take a hand.

BACK in the little town where the boys had taken the steamer nearly a week previous, Indian Pete was much concerned about disposing of his silver fox skin. He knew its value pretty well, but knowing it and getting it were different things. He owed the Hudson's Bay Company about sixty dollars, therefore, according to custom they should have the right to buy the skin. Perhaps if he waited a day or so the storeman would offer a better price; so he trudged back to the shanty where he was boarding with friends. The owner of the shanty was a half breed French Canadian named Henri Le Bœuf and his wife, Marie, a more or less full-blooded Indian distantly related to Pete. Besides them the only member of the household, not counting sundry poultry, was a dog named

Bebé, a huge creature of uncertain origin in which wolf showed very plainly.

Bebé was a friendly animal to those he knew well, but his circle of acquaintances was exceedingly small; therefore he had all the more affection and devotion to give to the selected few. Those he did not know well usually kept clear of him. One look at the large white fangs bared at the slightest provocation was enough for even the most stout hearted. During the summer life was easy for the dog. Food was abundant and there was no work to do except to keep the chickens out of the house and garden, and see that no one came to the house when his master and mistress were out. Life therefore would have been perfect but for the flies which kept him from unrestrained sleep. At night he always slept on the doorstep and no one not well known to him found it healthy to pay nocturnal visits. When the winter's snows covered the ground Bebé's days of indolence vanished. It was work, work, work; from daylight to dark, harnessed to a sled, he hauled great loads of logs cut in short lengths ready to be split for fire wood. No better dog was to be found in the neighbourhood and his master often boasted that Bebé could do almost as much as a horse, and this was not far from the truth.

As Pete drew near to the simple house, carrying

the sack containing the precious skin, Bebé quickly recognized him and came forward to lick his hand. Pete patted the massive head and spoke a few soft words of greeting in his own language. He then entered the shanty where all was quiet, Henri and his wife having retired some time before. On the table stood a bottle holding a candle which, when lit, revealed a loaf of home-made bread and a piece of pork, left ready for the evening meal. On the stove was the inevitable "pot" of tea simmering away, and strong enough to rot the inside of a bronze idol. Pete sat down and ate his meal, I was going to say *silently* but that would not have been true, for he was a noisy eater. Having finished he went to the little room that was his, carrying with him the fox skin. This he placed carefully on a swinging shelf where it would be safe from any hungry mice. Then taking off his moccasins and his rough jacket he threw himself down on the simple bed and was soon snoring serenely. While he slept and dreamed of selling the silver fox for a fabulous price, Bebé kept watch.

It was long after midnight when in the darkness which precedes the dawn a figure might have been seen by any one with owl-like eyes creeping stealthily along the path which led to the shanty. The dog heard the almost imperceptible sound and pricked his sharp-pointed ears as he raised his hand-

some head. Many times the creeping figure stopped to listen. Then his arm moved swiftly and a small bundle silently thrown through the air dropped some twenty yards from the dog. Instantly Bebé rose and darted out into the yard, just in time to see a figure running away at top speed. Without a moment's hesitation the dog bounded after it uttering no sound as he went. The man, realizing that he was being followed and that he had no chance of getting away from the swift-footed beast, stopped and turned, at the same time raising an axe above his head. Quicker than a flash Bebé jumped at the man's throat, but the axe caught him in mid air, cutting a great gash in the heavily coated shoulder. Still he managed to close with his assailant and drive his teeth into the man's arm and closed his powerful jaw like a vise. But the wound from the axe was deep and after holding on for a few seconds the muscles relaxed and the magnificent animal fell to the ground. The man quickly picked up the weapon which had fallen from his lacerated arm and struck the poor brute a deadly blow on the head.

Things had not gone as well as Sneaky Bill had hoped. Still he was comparatively safe if only he could get the dog's body away and dispose of it before daylight. Already the sky was lightening along the eastern horizon. To bury the body

would be dangerous as there would be no way of hiding the freshly disturbed earth. The lake offered the only solution. It was but a few hundred yards away, though the dog weighed nearly a hundred and fifty pounds he might drag it along; he could not carry it, for the tear in his arm was so painful that he found it impossible to lift the body to his shoulders. With some difficulty he dragged the load to the edge of the lake where the water was fairly deep. Placing the still warm body on a large flat rock he took the leather laces from his boots and tied a long narrow stone to the animal's leg and pushed the body into the water where it sank immediately.

In his hurry to dispose of the dog he had forgotten to cover up the blood stains where the encounter had taken place. He turned back cautiously, but before going more than half the distance he imagined that he heard the sound of voices in the direction of Le Bœuf's house. Fear seized him; he hurried along the edge of the lake and took shelter in a clump of bushes; there he waited fearful of moving until the reassuring daylight came and gave him fresh courage. Not daring to be seen in his present condition he sought a quiet cove, where, unseen, he washed away all the tell-tale blood stains from his clothes and body. He would have liked to bandage his arm which was becoming extremely

painful but he had no way of doing so. Instead, he put some tobacco juice on the wound hoping it would prevent blood poisoning. The smarting caused by the pungent fluid made him wince, but he had such a horror of poisoning that it was worth while suffering any pain to prevent it.

Having made himself normally presentable he approached by the most circuitous route his home, a little one-room shack on the outskirts of the settlement. Fortune favoured him and he succeeded in reaching his destination without meeting any one. He was hungry and dead tired after the happenings of the night so after a hasty meal he sought his filthy blankets and having no tender conscience to disturb him was soon sound asleep.

The household of Henri Le Bœuf, knowing nothing of the night's grim tragedy, awoke at their customary hour. Marie on opening the door was surprised at not seeing Bebé, for he always greeted her with the greatest effusion when first they met each morning. Thinking her dog would be back soon she went on with her duties, first of which was to let the poultry out from the tumbled down chicken shed. Her husband and Pete came out for their very perfunctory morning wash under the pump. Henri asked where the dog was and became greatly concerned when told that it had not been seen. He and Pete walked around the yard and

soon came to where signs of a scuffle showed plainly on the earth. Dark stains were instantly recognized as blood, and the trail leading to the lake was quickly followed. The trail terminated among the boulders on the edge of the water. Beyond that there was nothing to show what had happened. Henri could scarcely keep back the tears as he discussed the affair with Pete in a strange mixture of English, French, and Indian. He loved that faithful dog more than he had realized, and the certainty that he would never again see his pet hurt deeply. He and Pete swore deep vengeance on whoever had committed the foul deed, and they wondered what the motive could have been for such a dastardly act.

As the two angry men stood there considering what to do, Marie's voice was heard loudly calling them. Believing that she might have discovered something of interest they rushed up the hillside and found the woman in an excited condition holding a scrap of torn meat in her hand. Near her were three chickens gasping in the throes of death. She tried to explain that the birds had been eating the meat when she noticed them acting queerly. Before any others could touch the meat she secured it. Without doubt the case was one of poison, and equally without doubt the meat had been intended for the dog. This was all very mysterious.

They could see no reason why any one should want to kill poor Bebé. Certainly it could not be for spite as, so far as they knew, they had no enemies. While they stood talking together the three hens died, so their bodies were picked up and taken to the shanty. Whether or not the matter should be reported to the police was the next question. Pete was against doing this as he was sure they could track down the crime themselves better than the police. Henri, however, felt that as a householder he was entitled to the protection of the law. After a long discussion it was decided to wait until the following day and in the meantime they would at least leave no stone unturned to secure further evidence. The footprints of the criminal were carefully examined and a certain irregularity in the hob-nails noted. Pete covered up one set of the prints with a board as a protection against rain.

The fact that the tracks ended abruptly at the lake seemed to show that the man had escaped by canoe. Assuming this to be the case there was no way of following. The two indignant men therefore returned to see if they could find where the tracks led from. For some distance the footprints were easily followed, but later they became hopelessly mixed with numerous others. With extreme patience Henri and Pete examined the ground but wooden sidewalks tell no tales and in the

end the search was abandoned and they returned home in disgust.

It was late that morning before Sneaky Bill awoke, feeling much the worse for his experience. His shoulder hurt badly and made him afraid; yet he dared not go to a doctor, at least not at present, and perhaps if he waited another day it would be too late. As he lay on his bed he cursed himself for having been such a fool as to let the dog bite him. This mischance might easily spoil all his carefully arranged plans. Chewing a large quid of tobacco he lay there and thought of what to do. Plans were made and dismissed, always that wretched arm was the stumbling block. He needed both arms; he dared not let it be known that his arm was injured for in his guilty mind he imagined everyone would know immediately the cause of his injury. The necessity for quick action was imperative. Another day and he might be too late. So he finally decided to carry out a certain line of action without further loss of time. Accordingly he rose and after eating a hasty meal left the shack and proceeded to make a call on a friend of his. This friend, who was known only by the name of Sandy, lived in a small shack a couple of miles from the village. Bill reached the place and found the man sitting on his doorstep smoking.

"Mornin', Sandy," he said to the old man.

"Mornin', Bill. What brings you round? Come to enquire after my health, eh?"

"Got such a thing as a fox skin about you? I got a greenhorn who wants one and he'll give me six or eight dollars for it. Wants it for his gal, I think. I sold de last one I had so I come here. I 'member you had two or t'ree dat wasn't no good, so I t'ought you let me have 'em cheap."

Sandy looked at his visitor whom he had known for many years. They had been mixed up in one or two rather shady transactions and neither could have shown a spotless conduct sheet.

"Well, may be I have got what you want," said the old chap, going inside the one-room shack. Soon he reappeared carrying two fox skins. One was a "part silver" which bore evident traces of captivity and for that reason had never been disposed of. There had been a lot of publicity regarding the losses in a certain fox farm some time ago. Sandy's name had been mentioned rather freely and by no means favourably, hence this skin had never been offered for sale. The other skin was a defective gray of small value. Sneaky Bill took the two pelts in his hand and examined them critically. As he did so he smiled; certain ideas of his were not so very far from correct, he thought.

"How much?" he said holding out the "part silver."

"Cash, or promise?" queried Sandy.

"Oh, I pay alright very soon," was the reply.

"Promise, not cash, eh? Well, forty dollars."

"I t'ink you means about fifteen," he said, pointing deliberately to the tell-tale marks of captivity. "An' how much dis one?" touching the gray.

"Five, and it's damned cheap, too."

For a long time Bill thought without speaking. The gray could perhaps be "fixed" sufficiently well for his purpose, while the other would need very little done to it, if only he could obliterate certain marks which might cause trouble. But, after all, would that be necessary? In the end he decided to take the "part silver" with the promise that the money should be paid very soon.

Sandy wondered as he watched the retreating figure. Of course the story of the greenhorn was an obvious lie. Equally obvious was the fact that there was some crooked business on hand. Well, after all, it was no affair of his and he was very much relieved to have that skin out of the house. It had been a source of constant worry, for some months past. Fifteen dollars, if he ever got it, was worth more than a term in jail. In the collecting of that fifteen dollars it would be useful if he happened to know just a little about his friend's plans so he determined to do a bit of detective work, and perhaps he might get even more than the amount promised.

In the meantime Sneaky Bill was losing no time in getting to his shanty where he hid the fox skin. Then a visit to the general store, ostensibly to buy some food, where he got some dye. With these he returned and after securing his door, took out the skin and placed it in warm water. When it was sufficiently soft he carried out his dyeing operations according to his own ideas. The result was the changing of the "part silver" to a fairly good imitation of a "full silver." This was dried to the proper shape and rolled up securely in a long paper package which could be placed inside his shirt, where it would be safe from prying eyes. This much done he sauntered along to the Hudson's Bay store on the chance of meeting either Pete or Henri. On his way he happened to overhear some remarks about Henri's dog having disappeared. Without appearing to be particularly interested he joined the group of loafers and asked casually what they meant by the disappearance of the dog.

He was told that Henri was in a terrible way over the loss of his favourite animal, which he believed had been foully killed. At first Bill seemed incredulous but just then Pete came along and joined the group, and he added many details, but omitted to mention the discovery of the poison. On his alluding to the trail ending at the lake, Bill told how on the previous evening he had seen a fellow,

a stranger to him, land with a canoe just below Henri's house; the canoe, a birch bark one, was hauled upon a large flat rock near a jagged cedar stump, and only this morning, while walking down to get something he had left near the steamer landing, he had seen a canoe about a mile down the lake. Out of idle curiosity he had watched, wondering whose it was, when the man who was paddling stopped in a small cove and threw something heavy in the water. Whatever the thing was it made a big splash. Then the man went quickly to the store and disappeared into the trees carrying the canoe. At the time Bill had not given the matter much thought, but after hearing about the dog he wondered whether there might not be some connection between the loss of the dog and that man in the canoe. His listeners were fully agreed that the affair was worth consideration and Pete hurried back to tell his friend what had been said.

Bill did not remain long with the group of idlers. He had other business to do and it was getting late. Already the sun was sinking below the trees.

Scarcely fifteen minutes later Henri and Pete might have been seen in a canoe headed up the lake in the direction of the cove mentioned by Bill. During their absence there was quite a little excitement in the village. It was nothing less than a

fire, which in a settlement composed almost entirely of wooden buildings was a serious matter. Fortunately the wind was fairly light but even so there was no time to lose. Everyone flocked to where flame-streaked black smoke rose dark against the evening sky. The building which proved to be a small deserted cabin at the farther end of the village was too far gone, when the fire was discovered, to be saved, but other buildings in the vicinity were in danger from the falling sparks. Men, and women too, climbed on the endangered roofs and poured pails of water over the shingles, while the rest of the assembled crowd was busily engaged in carrying water in all sorts of vessels. It was not long before the burned building was reduced to a mere heap of smouldering ashes, and these were thoroughly saturated with water to render them harmless.

Among the crowd was Marie Le Bœuf and she was one of the first to leave the scene and return to her home. When she found that neither her husband nor Pete had returned, she busied herself preparing the men's supper, while she wondered what was keeping them so late. Some time after darkness had set in, voices were heard in the direction of the lake and soon the two men appeared. From the depressed expression on their faces it was easy to see that luck had not been with them,

and she knew her question was a useless one. Yet she asked their news, and there was none. Following the information given by Bill they had gone to the cove but had found no trace of any man or canoe, what tracks they found being all old.

After making a careful search they had returned determined to ask Bill further particulars about the landing place of the canoe. This they decided should be done next day, as it was now late.

The following morning as soon as breakfast was finished, Henri and Pete went off to interview Sneaky Bill. He was not at home, nor did any one know what had become of him. Some boys had seen him on the previous evening shortly after the fire and that was all the news they could gather. The man seemed to have disappeared completely.

Late in the afternoon Pete decided to make another attempt to sell the silver fox skin. He needed money; so taking the precious bundle from the hanging shelf he proceeded to the Hudson's Bay store. The clerk smiled at seeing him and asked whether he had come to his senses and was willing to take two hundred dollars.

"No," replied Pete. "You give me two honded dollar cash, and one honded trade. You know damn well dat plenty cheep."

"Look here, Pete, I'll give you one hundred and

fifty cash and one hundred trade. That's the best I can do."

The Indian looked at him a moment and said: "very good, here de fox, take 'em."

Again the clerk smiled as he took the bundle and laid it on a pile of cracker boxes. Then going to the safe he counted out the money and handed it over to Pete. Having done this he made an entry in his books giving the man one hundred dollars credit. Later he would look up the Indian's debt and balance the account. The skin was taken out, as the Indian wanted the sack back, but something about it struck the experienced clerk as peculiar, and he opened it out. Pete also noticed the skin, and the eyes of the two men met.

"What the blazes does this mean? That's not the skin you showed me the other night. Trying a flim-flam on me, eh!"

Pete was dumfounded. But what did it all mean? The skin was certainly not the one he had been guarding so carefully. Without saying a word he picked up and examined it critically. The tell-tale marks of captivity had not been entirely concealed. A gleam of sun showed the peculiar tone that is so hard to disguise in dyeing. He scratched his shiny black hair and remarked simply:

"I don' know." His surprise was so evidently

genuine that the clerk was convinced of the man's innocence of any attempt at fraud; also that there was something peculiar at the back of it all. So he called the Factor and between them they got the story of the killing of the dog, and the poison, for Pete thought he had better tell all he knew.

MacPherson decided it was a case for the police and sent round for the sergeant to come over to the store. In the meantime the Indian was doing some careful thinking. Who could have done this dirty trick? Was it possible that Henri was implicated? He and his wife had known all about the skin and where it had been kept. But then surely they would not have killed the dog, even as a blind. While he was trying to work out the various details and going over all that happened during the past days, the sergeant arrived—a big, burly good-natured man named Robinson. A man liked, respected and, by the wrong doers greatly feared, for his cool persistence in tracking down criminals had earned him an enviable reputation. He lost no time in getting all the facts, took possession of the questionable fox skin, and walked with Pete and MacPherson to Henri's house. All that he learned from the Le Bœufs corresponded exactly with Pete's account. The house was duly examined both inside and out, then the tracks which had been covered by the board. Robinson made detailed

notes of all items; one of the hens that had died was taken for examination, also the piece of meat. Then after warning all concerned to do no unnecessary talking, but to keep their eyes open and report anything likely to be of value, he went away with MacPherson. Not until then had he expressed any opinion as to who had committed the double crime.

"I want to find that dead dog," he said; "there may be some interesting evidence there. Next we have got to find out where that skin came from, and in doing so we will find out something that may solve the trouble there was on that fox farm of Raglan's. Somehow I believe that skin came from there. The poison won't be much of a clue, so many men keep it for killing wolves. The only point about it is, why, when the skunk, whoever he is, had decided to poison the dog, should he have let himself get mixed up with the animal as he evidently did?"

"Managed a bit badly," replied MacPherson. "Perhaps the dog caught him in the act of leaving that piece of meat and took him unawares. I think Pete's innocent, don't you?"

"Yes, I'd bet on that. He is a pretty decent sort and when that Raglan fox farm episode occurred Pete was miles away up country trapping, and could not possibly have had any direct hand

in it. The fellow who did that job got a pretty bad scare and has never, so far as we can learn, made any attempt to dispose of the skins. There were two of them stolen, and I am absolutely certain this is one of the two. The question is, did the man who stole that skin kill the dog so that he could sneak into Le Bœuf's and exchange the Raglan skin for the silver that Pete had? or are there two chaps mixed up in the deal? I think we have a rather interesting job on our hands."

"Yes, I think so too, but it's rather rough on poor old Pete. Pete certainly comes out on the slim end of the deal. I expect I shall have to advance the poor beggar some cash as he is pretty well strapped. If he ever gets a hold on the scoundrel that played the trick on him there will be a sample of administration of primitive justice I'm thinking, and then Pete will be in hot water."

"Yes," replied Robinson, thoughtfully, "that's just the trouble. We must get hold of Pete and urge him to be careful and not take things into his own hands. But of course that's easier said than done. Once these Indians get a real grudge against a man they much prefer to do the punishing with their own hand, regardless of cost, rather than see the chap sentenced in proper and very legal way to ten years' 'hard,' and I'm hanged if I blame the blighters. I know I have often felt like playing the

personal part of Lord High Executioner instead of doing everything in the cold-blooded legal way."

On reaching the store the two men separated, for, as the sergeant said, he had a good handful of work and trouble ahead of him. An hour or so later, Pete, in a very dejected frame of mind, came in and asked to see the Factor. In his hand he held the hundred and fifty dollars which he had received for the skin. It was all in the world he had and that must of course be given up now. So without a word he handed the money over to MacPherson. The old Scotchman scarcely knew what to do. There was no obligation on him to help the Indian and no real reason why he should not take the money back. Yet somehow the proceedings went against the grain. In his long years of dealing with the Indians he had found the two absolutely distinct types, the good and the bad, and it had been his experience that the good could *always* be trusted to play fair. So he took Pete into the office and explained with some feeling of embarrassment that he would not take back the money. If the skin never turned up, then Pete must repay by installments in skins. But in the meantime the money was his, and if he died before repayment, MacPherson would have to put it down to profit and loss. MacPherson added that he fully believed the skin would turn up.

He then gave the Indian some good advice as to avoiding taking the law into his own hands. Having done this he gave the man a cigar and bade him good-night.

It was a quiet, thoughtful, and very grateful Indian that walked slowly back to Le Bœuf's hut. MacPherson might be hard on a bargain, but he was a man, through and through, and Pete swore he'd repay the unexpected kindness at any cost. During the two following days, Sergeant Robinson was busy with his men on various trails. The results were not very valuable, but some of the clues might possibly lead to interesting discoveries. A search of Sneaky Bill's shanty had not revealed as much as Robinson expected. In his heart he believed Bill to be the culprit. Yet beyond the fact that he had vanished at such a critical time, there was not a single incident that coupled his name with the crime, and after all his sudden disappearance might not mean anything. Bill was a man of wandering habits, and was often away for weeks or even months without any reason, so far as his neighbours knew. Some dark stains on the filthy floor of the shanty were the only things of interest that the sergeant discovered in the hut, and outside a dark patch on the ground where some liquid had been emptied. A sample of the stained earth was taken for analysis.

On the evening of the second day somewhat to the sergeant's surprise, when he heard of it, Sneaky Bill returned. On his arrival by canoe, he made straight for Henri Le Bœuf's hut and told of having found the body of the dog floating among the rocks near the shore. Pete, it may be mentioned, had been sitting on a large upturned root smoking and thinking, and he had watched Bill come in close to shore, then he saw him stop to examine something in the water. Bill had then looked about him quickly but Pete was not sure whether or not his presence had been discovered. The next thing he saw was Bill landing and walking quickly to Henri's hut, whereupon Pete slipped down to the shore and found the dead dog. Without touching the swollen body he made straight for the police station and informed the sergeant of his discovery. After a moment's thought the sergeant told him to hurry back and say nothing of having reported the matter, but keep a good look-out for further happenings, and if possible prevent Henri touching the dog that night. So it was that Pete returned to the Le Bœufs just in time to see Henri and his wife walking down the bank with Bill. He followed the two as fast as he dared and caught up with them when they were still a few yards from the water. Le Bœuf's wife and Bill were slightly ahead. Pete quickly whispered a

few words to Henri and then stopped as they all did to gaze at the dead dog. Bill was about to pull the body ashore but Henri stopped him, saying it would be better to wait till morning when they could bury the dog by daylight.

Scarcely had they returned to the shanty before a canoe came quietly along close to the shore. In the canoe were two men who threw a piece of net around the dog and without making any sound paddled back to where they had come from, towing the body.

Sneaky Bill did not stay long with the Le Bœufs, and on leaving, bid them good-night and hoped they would catch the fellow who had killed the dog. No word had been said about the fox skin, though Bill was expecting to hear something about it. Apparently he went directly home, but after going a few hundred yards he doubled back among the brush, back of Le Bœuf's hut, and making a large circle came eventually to the place where but half an hour before he had stood looking at the dog. He could scarcely believe his eyes. Stare as hard as he could no sign of the body was discovered. In vain he crawled on his hands and knees among the boulders, and he was forced to the belief that the dog had vanished in some mysterious way. The more he considered the disappearance, the more alarming did it seem. Fear gripped him hard

as he made his way to his shanty. He did not know just what he expected to find there, and the fact that all was in darkness scarcely reassured him. For over an hour he waited about outside before plucking up courage to venture in, and having at last entered he dared not light a candle. In the dark he groped about until he found some crackers which he ate eagerly, stopping every short while to listen. Having satisfied the gnawings of hunger, he threw himself on the blankets to doze fitfully for several hours.

About one o'clock he determined to light a candle and see whether any one had been in the hut during his absence. Things had not been disturbed to any extent but his keen eyes noticed certain signs which left no doubt in his mind that someone had been making a search among his scant possessions. He smiled as he thought of the care he had exercised in arranging things so as to hide all evidence of his guilt. Yet the fact that the place had been searched proved that he was under suspicion. It was perfectly evident to his disturbed mind that the greater distance he could place between himself and his present inquisitive neighbours the better it would be for him. The sooner he moved, the farther he could set before daylight. So, without waiting to do much packing, he threw a hunk of pork into a sack, with a small bag of flour, some tea,

sugar and matches, and one blanket which he hoped would not be missed and off he went into the night.

Early next morning Sergeant Robinson came to Bill's shanty only to find his bird had flown. This in a way was satisfactory for it fastened the guilt a little more firmly on the man's shoulders. The examination of the dog's body had given the new bootlace as a clue worth following. The clerk in the Hudson's Bay store had identified it as one of theirs and declared he had only sold one new pair within the past six weeks and that was to Sneaky Bill. Now the question was, what had become of Sneaky Bill? Of course in a wild, trackless country with its endless waterways a man can hide for months, but in the end the net spread by those whose duty it is to enforce law and order will be almost certain to catch the criminal. No time was lost in sending out the alarm in every direction, with full description of the culprit.

CHAPTER VI

For the present we must leave Sneaky Bill to the care of the police and those he had wronged while we return to Charlie and Jack.

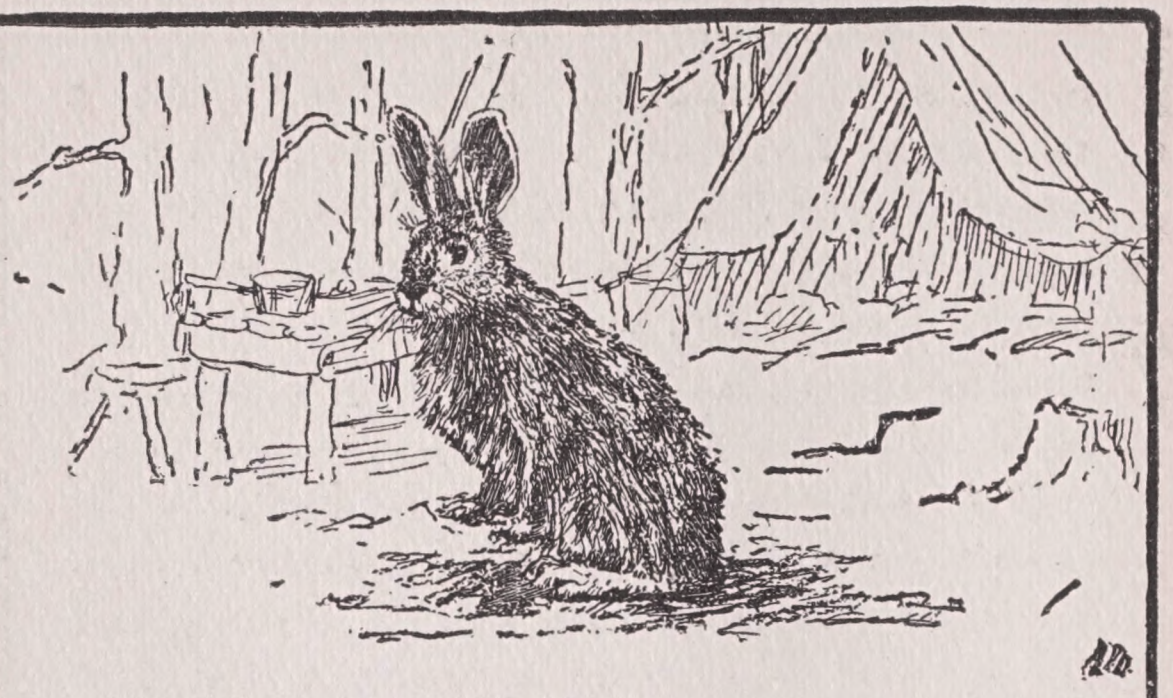
They make camp comfortable. Big-ears the hare. Some Canada jays make themselves at home; a trip up the chain of lakes; catch some trout and lose them; the spruce partridge; a loon's nest; bad weather sets in; return to camp; a thief's work; go to Beaver Town for more food; report their loss.

THE next few days (after the experiences recounted in Chapter IV) were devoted almost entirely to making the camp comfortable. Furniture, such as tables, chairs, and shelves had to be made. The construction of a shelter over the table and up to the edge of the fire occupied some little time. The shelter was made of fairly stout uprights with forked tops; into the crotches strong cross bars were laid and across these, lighter ones at close intervals were fastened by means of pliable viburnum or witherod; then large sheets of birch bark were cut and laid over-lapping each other in order to shed water. To avoid the possibility of

fire, sandy mud taken from the lake was used as a covering, so that sparks would not fall on the inflammable bark. This roof was about twelve feet square, and eight feet high at the upper side. Each day an hour or two was devoted to cutting fire wood and piling it up in a neat heap, with a good supply of birch bark for kindling.

While out one day searching for bark, Charlie came upon a young hare feeding in the woods. The little creature showed not the slightest fear and allowed Charlie to approach within four or five feet. Even then it scarcely stopped eating. It would bite off some particularly succulent plant and eat this while sitting on its absurdly large hind legs, all the while looking at the intruder with a comical expression which was accentuated by the continual flopping about of immense ears. At the same time its nose kept wriggling with surprise at the strange scent of man.

After about a quarter of an hour Charlie leaned down very carefully and caught the little fellow, but even this did not cause it any very great concern. When Charlie offered it some young leaves they were accepted as though there was nothing peculiar in the proceeding. All of which was rather astonishing. Taking the confiding animal back to camp Charlie introduced it to Jack, who suggested giving it some soda cracker soaked in



Big-ears, the young hare, was Charlie's greatest pet

condensed milk. Master hare approved thoroughly of this dainty dish and when he had finished, looked about enquiringly for some more, even following Jack into the tent when he went for another cracker. All day long the little animal stayed about camp entirely contented in the new surroundings. At night the boys arranged a bed for their new pet inside the tent, where it slept peacefully.

During these days the weather did not behave very well. There were numerous showers and cool wind, while the sun scarcely showed itself. Under such conditions the work about camp was the best occupation as there was no temptation to go off on exploring trips, and the coolness enabled

Canada jays and red squirrels took their meals with the boys

the boys to do the heavy work in comparative comfort. Woodcutting on a hot summer day is by no means a desirable job.

A family of four Canada jays looked upon the camp as their own property and spent most of their time watching the occupants work. During meal times the birds became almost too friendly as they sat on the table and helped themselves without ceremony to whatever took their fancy. It was great fun watching them, except when they seized a bit of food almost out of the boys' mouths.

By the time the camp had been made really comfortable the weather changed for the better so a trip was planned with the intention of explor-

ing the surrounding country. A light outfit was arranged and the two boys started one fine morning, working in a northwesterly direction.

What to do with the hare was a difficult question and in the end it was decided to take the little creature with them. Some leaves and small plants were gathered and put into the canoe together with the hare who seemed perfectly satisfied.

By paddling, poling, and occasionally portaging they made their way through the succession of ponds which formed part of the stream. Nearly every pond contained one or more beaver lodges and most of the ponds were formed by dams. On coming into one of the smaller ponds a family of beaver was surprised sunning themselves on a grassy bank. The family consisted of Mrs. Beaver and her five youngsters, little fluffy creatures, rather grayer and lighter in colour than the mother. Unfortunately there was no time to see them properly as they scuttled into the water with annoying rapidity. Nor did they again show themselves though the boys waited nearly an hour hidden in the grass. While they were watching, a cow moose nearly walked over them, and it was a question which was the more surprised at the unexpected meeting.

On the shores of the fourth pond a deserted trapper's log cabin was found. It was entirely

empty and except by squirrels and mice had evidently not been used for several years. While walking about the woods near the shanty, Charlie came upon a spruce partridge, or grouse. She was in a terribly agitated state at seeing a human being. One of her wings appeared to be broken, also a leg, and she flopped about in a most amusing way. Charlie called out to his companion to come, and Jack, approaching from behind the bird, nearly trod on two chickens. One of these he managed to catch which added greatly to the mother bird's consternation. She tried by every means in her power to attract attention to herself, but the boys knew the trick and after a short time liberated the youngster. Instantly it ran off. Not toward its parent but in an opposite direction, and was almost instantly lost to view. Search as they might, no sign of it could be found. In some way the old bird knew when her brood was safe and with a suddenness that was truly astonishing became cured of all her infirmities and ran off at full speed. The boys, anxious to see what would happen, climbed up a tree and waited quietly. In about a quarter of an hour, a very small peep was heard, then another. These were immediately answered by the mother call, and within a minute eight or nine small brown fluffy chickens were back with their mother.

"Funny idea that," said Charlie, "pretending to be disabled so as to induce us to follow her. I wonder if it ever works."

"I suppose it does or they wouldn't try it! Nearly all birds seem to try the same trick. It always seems to me that it only attracts attention to the fact that the young are somewhere near by. Whether their four-footed enemies reason things out along the same lines, as we do, I would like to know."

"So would I, Jack, but I don't know of any way of finding it out. These spruce partridge are the birds commonly called 'fool hens,' I suppose. They must be queer idiots to allow people to catch them with a noose on the end of a fishing rod, and yet I have been told that this is often done."

"Yes, but I believe it is really true. What do you say to going out to that island?" Jack remarked, pointing to a scrub covered island in the middle of the pond.

"Personally I should very much prefer some grub before doing anything else. My tummy is much more interested in food than islands, which is not to be wondered at, considering the hour."

As they sat on the edge of the pond eating their cold lunch, a loon was seen swimming toward the island. The loon landed on the farther side so the boys could not see when it disappeared, but

as it did not appear again there was every reason to suppose its nest was there. Having finished lunch, no time was lost in making their way to the island. On approaching they paddled very quietly, peering among the scrub covered sand and stones. But though they went completely around the island no sign of the loon was seen. Once more they paddled round, this time still closer to the shore but still nothing could be seen of the bird. So they beached the canoe, and, as Charlie was about to land, the loon darted off her nest almost under his feet. She dived under water immediately and did not come to the surface until she was fully a hundred yards away. Then she swam backward and forward uttering her strange cries at regular intervals and flopping about as though disabled. Under a low bush the nest was found with its two long, dull olive coloured eggs. This was the first time the boys had ever seen a loon's nest so it was not to be wondered at that they were delighted at the interesting discovery. Having duly examined the nest and eggs they left the little island, greatly to the relief of the pair of excited birds.

At the north end of the fourth lake a small stream was found flowing through a tract of swampy land and leading into this, from the west, was another and smaller stream which was dammed in three places. Above the upper and larger dam was quite

a small pond with a fine beaver lodge on its north shore. Back from this a large poplar grove stretched up toward the higher ground. This grove had evidently furnished the colony with food during the previous winter as the ground was strewn with numerous cut and partly peeled trunks lying among the sharp pointed stumps. The boys did not spend much time in this beaver settlement, but made note of the place to be visited later, when the animals began their preparations for winter. The afternoon was getting along and there was still much to be explored before making camp for the night; so they returned to the stream and pushed the canoe against the swift current of the narrow water course. It was hard going owing to the numerous sharp bends, but fortunately the distance was only a few hundred yards and then to their surprise they came to a long lake, in the middle of which there was a narrow, thickly wooded island about four hundred yards in length. The greater part of this island was only fifty or sixty yards in width but the northern end widened out forming an irregular circle of grass-covered ground some two hundred yards across. By unanimous agreement this was decided on as the camping place for the night. There is a certain fascination about an island that appeals strongly to us all, old or young. Just why this should be is

difficult to say, but probably it goes back to the primitive idea of the security afforded by a surrounding of water. For young people the island should be small and this one was exactly right. There was an ample supply of wood for fires, while the lake yielded water as clear as crystal.

It was decidedly too early to settle down for the night; so when camp was made and wood cut ready for the fire, Charlie suggested they should make a trip to the extreme north end of the lake where the hills rose abruptly to a considerable height. Here they found a small stream which came tumbling down the steep slopes forming a miniature cascade where it fell into the lake. Several trout were seen to rise in the swirl at the edge of the white foam. This was too much of a temptation and without a word both lads got their rods out and started casting. There are times and places when fishing is too good to be interesting and this was an example of such fishing. With three flies on a leader, it meant three trout hooked the moment the water was touched. In playing the three, one would frequently get off, but instantly another trout took the unoccupied fly. The fish ran from a quarter to half a pound with an occasional larger one. For a few minutes it was rather good fun, but even though after the first few casts only one fly was used, it was not sport in any sense of the

word. So after catching and keeping two dozen of the plumpest fish Jack suggested that they land and take a walk up the highest hill and have a look at the surrounding country. A good landing place was soon found and they started up the densely wooded slope. Owing to the great number of windfalls the walking was difficult, and as usual in the case of hill climbing the distance proved to be very much greater than it appeared from the lake. After about half an hour of arduous work the golden glow in the sky warned the young explorers that they had better return at once if they expected to reach the island in time to cook a meal before dark. The prospect of those nice trout for dinner made them hurry down the hillside at dangerous speed, and they soon brought up at the canoe thoroughly out of breath.

As they pushed the canoe into the water Jack happened to notice the place where the trout had been left, but not a sign of a fish was to be seen. What had taken them no one could say. The cold and bitter fact remained that they would not have those fine fat trout for dinner.

"Let's have a try for some more. It won't take us but a few minutes to catch enough for to-night," Charlie remarked.

"Right you are. We must get three or four while it is still more or less daylight. But I would like

to know what in the name of the great bull moose took those fish."

"Some lightning raider, I should say, Jack. Perhaps the lake is haunted and the ghost of the cascade has taken our catch for his family dinner. Well, never mind, we'll know better next time, but in the meanwhile here we are, so let's at 'em."

Scarcely an hour had elapsed since they had stopped fishing, but what a change had taken place in that short time! Cast as carefully as possible not a fish rose. Flies were changed but without effect and so in the end the two very hungry and disgusted boys paddled to the island camp and proceeded to cook a comparatively slender meal of fried bacon and slap-jacks.

The hare, which had been christened "Big-ears," was found feeding in the camp, perfectly contented. While the boys were engaged in cooking operations a curious whirr was heard. This was repeated several times before the cause was discovered. The island, because of its safety, was used as a roosting place for a number of ruffed grouse, and the birds were seen in the dim light flying across from the surrounding shores. It was fortunate for those birds that both boys had been brought up to regard all game laws as sacred. Otherwise some of them might have been disillusioned as to the safety of the island.

Early next morning a visit was paid to the cascade, Jack having suggested that trout for breakfast would be very acceptable. Fortunately the fish were so well behaved that within twenty minutes a couple of dozen beauties were landed and the young fishermen had a delicious breakfast of some of these freshly caught trout. After clearing up the camp another attempt was made to reach the top of the high hill. This time the fish were hung on a branch out of the reach of any four-footed thief. From the summit of the hill there was a splendid view of the surrounding country. To the right the main river could be seen winding its way like a silver thread among the densely wooded country. On the left were a series of small lakes joined by a stream which ran down in a northerly direction till it reached the large river. Here and there other ponds and lakes were observed dotted about among the hills.

While they were examining the country and getting a general idea of various waterways the sky became overcast. Evidently a storm was brewing so the boys decided to return to the lake and await developments. Scarcely had they reached the canoe than the rain commenced, so they made straight for the island, and hurriedly put up the little shelter tent. The wind which was blowing from the north increased in violence while

the rain fell in torrents. All day this continued without any intermission, and the hours dragged along with monotonous slowness. To make a fire under the conditions was no easy task, but eventually under the shelter of an upturned root they succeeded in getting one started and so were able to cook some sort of a meal. The morning's catch came in most useful as without them there would have been nothing but bacon, and of course the inevitable slap-jacks.

Night came on without any change in the weather, but it was rather cosy being marooned on the little island, and the boys were lulled to sleep by the waves which slapped noisily on the weather shore.

The next morning offered no hope of a change, so it was decided to make a bolt back to the home camp. With the wind blowing a gale behind them the canoe flew over the small white crested waves and down the crooked stream which linked together the numerous ponds. Altogether it was rather good fun in spite of the driving rain which made it necessary to keep bailing the canoe almost incessantly. The whole run was made in remarkably quick time and the boys hailed with delight the view of the Four Island Camp for they were soaked through, and most anxious to get into some dry clothes. The canoe was quickly landed and

hauled up on the bank and turned over. The two small packs were then taken into the large tent.

"What the mischief has happened here!" said Jack, as he threw back the flap.

Charlie following quickly saw that someone had evidently been in during their absence. Everything was upset and scattered about in utter confusion.

"What do you suppose it means, Jack? Looks as though whoever it was, had been searching for something. Even the pockets of our extra clothes have been turned inside out. I wonder what is missing. Lucky we left no money behind."

The result of their search showed that one pair of blankets was missing. Also some underwear. Nearly all the tea, sugar, and bacon, and more than half the supply of flour had been taken. The situation was serious and difficult to explain, as honesty in the woods is taken for granted. Nothing could be learned from foot-prints because of the heavy rain, and the thief had left no other clue to his identity.

"We are up against the pleasant task of going back to the Hudson's Bay store and laying in a new supply of grub," observed Jack, after careful examination of the remaining outfit.

"So I imagine," Charlie replied. "But what are we going to do with the things we leave behind

here, for that light fingered chap will probably pay us another visit?"

"It would be best to make a bundle of all our stuff and hide it up a tree. I should think then it would be reasonably safe from all sorts of thieves. We might as well get things ready now so that we can make an early start to-morrow, if the weather changes for the better."

But as it happened the storm continued until late the following afternoon. Then the rain stopped and the outfit that was to be left behind was carefully hidden in the crotch of a large birch tree a couple of hundred yards from the camp. Early next morning, after saying good-bye to Big-ears, who was left behind as it would not have been feasible to take him on the long trip, a start was made with a very light outfit.

Fortunately the weather was fine, clear and cool with a good breeze blowing from the north. This was favourable for the trip, so also was the swollen river which carried the canoe along at wonderful speed. In an incredibly short time the first lake was reached.

As the wind was directly behind them, a piece of the small shelter tent was arranged on the pole. This served as a sail which made paddling scarcely necessary. The few miles of still water were soon passed and the sail was taken down before the

The spruce partridge quiets down now that she knows her young are safely hidden

river was reached. Coming from the comparative quiet of the lake the boys started down the turbulent river. The canoe, like a thing alive, danced over the bubbling, white-capped crests of the waves. It was a delightful and exhilarating sensation and no work was required beyond keeping the light craft in the centre of the current and dodging an occasional racing log. With such speed the various camp sites could scarcely be distinguished as the canoe made its way past the wooded banks. What had taken the boys four days to do against the stream was now done in a single day and both agreed it was the finest day's travelling they had ever enjoyed.

The boys started down the turbulent river. The canoe danced over the bubbling, white-capped crests of the waves

The steamer's landing place was reached just before dark. By good luck the boat was due the following afternoon, and when she came the old captain gave the two wanderers a most hearty welcome. On hearing of the cause for their unexpected return the captain looked serious as he remarked:

"There is only one low-down cuss in the whole country who would do such a dirty trick and that is Sneaky Bill."

Then he told of what had happened at the village after Charlie and Jack had left. Putting two and two together the general opinion was that Bill knew more about the changing of that silver fox

skin and the death of the dog than any one else. Next day the steamer reached her destination and the two boys went directly to the Hudson's Bay store and reported the stealing of their supplies to MacPherson. He took them over to the police station where the story was repeated to the sergeant, who was greatly concerned. He decided it would be well to send a couple of men up country with the boys when they returned the following day.

During the afternoon fresh supplies were purchased and put on the steamer ready for the early morning start. Several letters were received from home which gave the good news that Evelyn with her father and mother would be coming for a whole month and they might be expected to arrive on the tenth, instead of the sixteenth of September, as originally planned. In replying to the letters, full details were given where they should all meet but it was thought best to omit all mention of the stolen food, as it would only cause unnecessary worry, and could not possibly do any good. The old Factor invited the two boys to stay the night at his house and was extremely kind to them. He promised to take care of the Sylvesters when they arrived and send up enough provisions with them to last the whole party a month.

CHAPTER VII

Return to Four Island Camp with Cooper and Gibson; Big-ears becomes very tame, so does a jay; jealousy results; Gibson gets on the trail of the thief, and loses it; the boys are left alone again.

THE trip back to Four Island Camp by steamer and canoe was entirely uneventful. The two policemen proved interesting companions. Both were thorough woodsmen and handled their canoe in a way that called forth the admiration of the boys. Their names were Richard Cooper and Frank Gibson. Cooper was a fine type of the athletic Englishman of good family, but being a younger son he had been sent out to Canada to fend for himself; he was given less than a hundred pounds capital with which to start life and a collection of the usual unsuitable articles, such as innumerable boots varying from tennis shoes to fine hunting boots, golf clubs, saddlery, canteen outfit, cricket bats, tennis racquets, medicine cases, etc. Nearly all of which had been chucked away within a few weeks after his arrival in the new land. Being of

a roving disposition he wandered over various parts of the country and by chance met an old schoolmate who was in the police. The accounts of the life appealed very strongly to young Cooper who, it may be remarked, had managed by this time to get rid of nearly all his money and, thinking he would be stationed with his friend, he joined. To his disgust, as soon as he had completed his training, he was sent to a place hundreds of miles from his friend. But all that was forgotten. He had been now several years in his present station and was perfectly happy and had done some very good work. In fact rumour had it that he was up for promotion within a short time, as the sergeant had recommended him strongly.

Frank Gibson, though of humbler birth than his companion, was a good, wholesome, clean-cut man. He too had come out from the Old Country to seek his fortune and chance had caused him to join the police. He was noted for his persistence in any work he undertook. Yet at the same time he lacked ambition and was quite content to go on doing his duty with conscientious determination, without thinking of reward beyond his ordinary pay, and nearly half of his money went home regularly to his widowed mother and sister. His only ambition was to go back before many years to visit the home he had left when only seventeen

years old. He was never weary of talking about that home down in Devon where his mother kept a tiny country shop, an institution which barely paid its own expenses.

With such companions it is needless to say that the time passed only too quickly. The late evening of the third day out found the four travellers carrying their loads over MacPherson's trail and the camp was reached just before dark. To Charlie's and Jack's great delight the first thing that greeted them on their arrival was Big-ears. As no mention of the little hare had been made to Gibson and Cooper they were somewhat surprised to see the funny little creature hop down the path to meet the boys. It was too late to make any investigation that night so the party of four devoted their energies to producing and demolishing a good meal; having done this to their satisfaction they soon turned in for the night.

After a very early breakfast the following morning the police went down to the river with the boys and assisted them in bringing up the supplies that had been left at the foot of the portage. Then the two experts made a careful examination of the camp, circling back through the woods in the hope of finding some possible clue to the recent visitor; but the rain had done its work only too thoroughly and no trace could

be found. This was disappointing as it involved casting in all directions on the mere hope of finding some trace of the thief. There was but slight chance of his having come by canoe. This would have been dangerous and yet there was no way of telling whether the finding of the camp was purely chance or whether the boys had been trailed. In fact there was so little to work on that the two men scarcely knew how to begin. After considering all the points they decided to separate, each one going a different direction, with the understanding that they would return within three days or as soon as anything of importance was discovered.

During these three days the boys remained within calling distance and amused themselves with fishing, watching moose and other creatures and improving the camp in anticipation of the family's arrival in a few weeks. Big-ears the hare was a constant source of interest, his tameness being almost ridiculous. Like a pet dog he would follow Charlie about whenever he was in or near the camp and sit up to beg for food which he could have procured easily for himself. The Canada jays at first resented the hare's familiarity, especially when it came to his taking some food which they wanted; but after a short time they made friends or more correctly speaking, ignored each

other. One of the jays became devoted to Jack and would always sit on his arm during meals, and even take the food off the fork or spoon before Jack could get it to his mouth. There was great fun in having the various birds and animals so tame; the assortment included two mice, a red squirrel, the hare, four or five jays and a pair of chickadees, to say nothing of many other birds that became on fairly good terms.

It was fully anticipated that the two men would return during the afternoon of the third day. Everything was ready for their arrival including some fine trout, but the day passed and evening came without any sign of them, and in the end Charlie suggested that they should have dinner themselves and keep things ready to get a meal for the others if they should return later. Finally, with the coming of darkness, the boys gave up hope and turned in, tired with the suspense of the long hours of waiting.

About noon on the fourth day Cooper arrived at the camp with the information that he had found nothing of importance. On hearing that Gibson had not yet returned he was much surprised and somewhat worried, as neither of them had carried food for more than four days. Well he knew Gibson's persistent nature, and that if Gibson once came on any clue, however slight, he

would follow it until some information was gleaned; so comforting himself with the thought that the delay probably meant something in the way of news, Cooper settled himself down to the good meal that was ready.

The rest of the day passed with dreary slowness. No one could settle down to doing anything and beyond cutting some fire-wood and catching a few trout no work was done and conversation lagged. Cooper was frankly anxious for the safety of his companion, as there were so many possibilities of trouble which loomed up with annoying clearness. Dinner was eaten by the last lingering light of day. Even the jays had given up hope of joining in the belated meal and had gone off to their respective roosts. Big-ears, not minding the dusk, sat by the side of Charlie and nibbled his bit of cracker with his usual relish. As the night was cold a good fire was made, and the three watchers sat by it and waited till the woods were great dark masses of mystery. Cooper tried to tell of some of his experiences in hunting down those who broke the law, but the stories lacked their customary interest and life. While telling the stories he would frequently stop to listen, and all three, open-mouthed, would strain their ears to catch the slightest sound. Once something was heard in the woods back of the camp, and all three jumped

to their feet, sure that it was Gibson, but it was only a moose, and they soon heard the splash as the big animal entered the lake.

"Well, I suppose we might as well hit the blankets," remarked Cooper; "it's pretty late and I expect we are all tired. Gibson would scarcely do much walking through the woods in the dark, even though he does know this country like a book."

Needless to say, there was no dissenting voice to this suggestion, and within a few minutes all three were wrapped comfortably in their bedding.

About midnight a weary figure entered the camp, making scarcely any noise, yet the slight sound was sufficient to wake the sleepers. Cooper called out: "Hello, Gibson, that you? What news have you got?"

"Well, the most important and pressing news is that I am so darned hungry that before further conversation I simply must have some grub."

Charlie had slipped on his boots, and with Cooper's help quickly provided the necessary food. The embers of the dying fire were soon blown into a blaze sufficient to heat water for tea. The hungry man ate ravenously for some time before making any attempt at conversation, while the others sat about the fire waiting to hear the result of his search. At length, when all the food had vanished, he took out his stumpy pipe, carefully

filled it, and taking a piece of birch bark soon had a satisfactory light. Then between the puffs of smoke he gave the following account:

"That's a lot better! Now, let's start at the beginning. After we separated four days ago I hit off in a westerly direction, going over the stream by means of that very convenient beaver dam. It was pretty rough travelling through swampy ground for the first few hours, but after a time the going got better. I was then heading about northwest. When going through a piece of poplar woods which had been cut by beaver I saw the darnedest biggest moose that I have ever seen. His horns will be a prize for someone this fall. However, I wasn't out moose hunting, it was skunk I was after. As I went along I examined the country pretty thoroughly but the devil a sign of a two-footed man did I see. By evening I was round the west side of that highish hill over there," pointing with the stem of his pipe in a north-westerly direction; "it was getting late so I decided to make my happy home in a sheltered nook, where I would light a very small fire without much fear of being seen. By the time I had satisfied my inner self, it wasn't far from being dark, but I thought I could smoke my old pipe on some nice conspicuous rock and have a look at the landscape, just for curiosity, you know, so I hiked up the hill

and found a nice soft rock—I softened it with a tuft of branches—and there I sat like a bloomin' statue. Well, I hadn't been there long when to my delight I saw a little bit of blue smoke trying to make its way to Heaven. It was a good distance off, the smoke as well as Heaven, almost due north. Now that bit of smoke looked pretty interesting to me, and I wondered who might be sitting at the other end of it. Between that smoke and myself was about a mile and a half of very rough timberland with hills making it most uneven. To try to get through in the dark would be just about impossible, and no one could hope to do it at all without making a deuced lot of noise, so that if the chap who made that smoke was not over anxious for visitors he could either leave word that he was not at home, or be the only mourner at a quiet midnight funeral. I have, strange to say, a strong personal dislike to funerals, particularly if I have to be the star performer, and I wanted to catch that chap—it would look better in my report than if he caught me—so I made a careful note of where the fire burned and then went to my blankets. Before daylight I turned out, had a mouthful to eat and started north. It seemed like a pretty sure thing and I was betting heavily on myself, and giving the other chap small odds, as I made my way with as little noise as

possible. But the woods were about the thickest I have ever seen, and the going got worse and worse. It just seemed as though some fellow, not having anything better to do had spent a few hundred years gathering all the most irregular shaped trees he could find and tying the whole darned bunch together and dropping them wherever I wanted to walk. I was almost sorry that I wasn't a monkey instead of being a clumsy man. It was beyond me to keep going straight and even with the utmost care the general direction got tied up in a hard knot. By the time the sun had risen to a decent height I did not know where on earth I was, or rather, I did not know where anything else was. There was no good in getting rattled, so I tried going backward and forward like a dog quartering a field after birds. I spent the whole of the blessed day doing this, that is, when I wasn't scraping sweat and mosquitoes and black flies off my handsome face. It was wonderful good fun, I don't think, and of course it was not at all tiring, certainly not! By evening I was about all in, so I made for a high hill and fixed up a sort of camp, hoping to see the confounded smoke again but nothing like that happened, and I went to sleep jolly well disgusted with everything, including myself. The next morning I felt a bit better and took another try at the job. To make a long story short, about noon

I suddenly came across a very small and inconspicuous birch bark shack, and a pretty recent fire, but nothing else, except some footprints which I examined very carefully. Here is a sort of sketch of the prints," and he held a piece of paper down by the fire so that the rough drawing could be seen by its flickering light. Cooper examined it for a moment and then drew from his pocket a note book; opening this, he turned to a page on which was the drawing of two footprints; these he compared with Gibson's sketch.

"I'll be hanged if these aren't the same boots!" he said turning to Gibson. "So the man that killed Henri Le Bœuf's dog is the man that had that camp, and I think we can guess who that man is."

"Yes, but the question is where is, rather than who is, the man?" said Gibson. "For I'll be shot if I know, and how the dickens he knew of my being on his trail bothered me badly, I can tell you; but wait till you hear how it happened. After looking about the deserted camp I felt that there was no doubt of the fellow having left it for good, or at least he intended I should think so in case I found it. Yet believing there was just a chance that he was bluffing me, I determined to hide myself not far away and keep watch for a day or so. With this bright idea in my mind I went to look

Like tiny animated balls of gray and black fluff the chickadees moved among the branches searching for food

for a good place to wait, and here is where the joke is on me. I had not gone more than about seventy or eighty yards before I came on *my own* trail of the previous day! Wouldn't that jar you? To think I had blundered almost on top of the skunk's camp and had never known it. How he must have laughed! The wonder is that he did not drill a hole in my noble head. The only reason that he refrained from doing so was his dislike of noises, and of course he didn't know whether I had a pal in the neighbourhood. After this disgusting discovery I gave up the watching idea and decided to do a bit of trailing. After a lot of searching I eventually found what looked like his tracks. I

A typical beaver lodge

followed these, though it was slow, tiresome work, and I need scarcely say I kept a sharp lookout for the man himself. Toward evening I came to a small stream running northward. The sly dog, thinking he might be followed, had crossed the stream and walked east. After going a few hundred yards the trail was lost in an alder swamp. Now I was sure no man could do much travelling through such a place so I turned back and made a minute examination of the footprints. These revealed nothing, but near by I found some curious, very indistinct tracks. The rascal had fastened a piece of bark to each boot and had returned to the stream. There all signs ended. I walked along the bank

and about five hundred yards down came upon evidence of some one having been there, as the grass was slightly disturbed. The mark of the bow and stern of a canoe could be seen clearly, where it had been turned upside down under some bushes. All chance of catching my friend was at an end now, as he had undoubtedly escaped in the canoe. My own idea is that our only way is to carry our canoe over to the stream and follow it down and see if there is any sign of his landing. I tried going along that stream but the walking was frightful and in the end I gave it up, and made my camp on a knoll some way back from the water. This morning, or I suppose I should say yesterday morning, I started back to find this camp and foolishly tried a short cut that I had made once during the winter. Then all was frozen and solid, and I never realized what a beastly swampy piece of ground it was. I simply could not get through and eventually had to swing back in a northeasterly direction till I struck good going. I got across the stream connecting with this lake by going over a beaver dam at the foot of a larger pond in which there is an island and a beaver lodge."

"We call that Number Three Lake, but you must have found it pretty swampy," Jack remarked.

"Well, yes, it was, but I got through after some little trouble and made straight for the high ridge

where the walking was good. You see it was getting along toward sundown before I reached the hard wood ridge and I had had no food since my very slim breakfast, so I meant to reach this camp or bust, and here I am. If you have no serious objections I should like a few minutes' sleep, as I suppose we shall be off early, won't we, Cooper?"

"Yes, I expect we had better not lose too much time, and almost think our best way would be to make for the main river and go along to where the Little Musquash stream comes in. I believe the stream down which you found the canoe had gone is the one that leads into those two or three ponds from which the Little Musquash comes. We shall save time, I expect, if we do this."

"Right you are. Kick me up when you think of moving for I shall be a bit sleepy if I am not mistaken. Good-night all! I have made a bad hash of things but even that won't prevent my sleeping."

Cooper had mercy on the tired man and did not disturb him until after six o'clock, by which time he had, with Charlie's help, got breakfast ready. Gibson rubbed his eyes when he was well shaken and crawled out of his blankets, with the air of a man who would be quite willing to sleep on for many hours. A wash and a shave does wonders and he was soon as brisk as any of the party.

Cooper didn't waste much time in gossip. He wanted to be on the hunt for the thief and as soon as the meal was finished the two started off down MacPherson's trail, with the boys accompanying them as far as the river. Cooper promised to let them know the result of their efforts if he came back the same way. If there was anything new to report, Charlie promised to leave a note under the roots of a certain birch tree near the trail so that Cooper could call for it on his way down.

As the little gray canoe turned round a bend in the river and was lost to view Charlie and Jack turned back to Four Island Camp, both sincerely sorry to have lost the two men who had been such interesting companions.

CHAPTER VIII

See some beaver, a deer and her two fawns; find a wonderful beaver canal; a beaver family play games; the history of a beaver colony and what it means.

IT WAS still quite early when the boys got to camp and, as the day was wonderfully fine, Jack suggested a little trip to the west in search of beaver work. Taking the canoe they crossed Four Island Lake and made their way quietly up a small sluggish stream. They followed this some few hundred yards when Charlie, who was standing up and poling the canoe, sighted a pond ahead and in the middle of the pond was a conspicuous beaver lodge. On the chance of finding the animals out enjoying the early sun he suggested that they go ashore and crawl up to the pond. With the utmost caution they made their way through the sparse undergrowth until the bank was reached. A family of mergansers was seen, swimming along in single file, the mother bird leading, while her young brood followed. As they neared the shore something was observed

on a grassy point not more than fifty yards away. At first Charlie thought it was only a stump and Jack was about to examine it with the glasses when the object moved. The mother merganser had caught sight of the boys and had uttered a warning call. This apparently had awakened the large beaver—such the object proved to be—who now sat up and sniffed the air as though wondering why the warning call had been given, and not at all pleased at having been disturbed. Seeing no cause for alarm the drowsy creature settled itself down again to sleep in the warm sunlight. As there was no other sign of life nearby, the boys stood up; whereupon the mother merganser again gave the call and scurried across the pond as fast as she could go, with her brood following. This disturbed the beaver once more and, without waiting to see what the cause of the alarm might be, he slipped into the water and vanished from sight.

"Let's have a look at this dam," Charlie said, "and then we can take the canoe across and visit the lodge."

The dam which formed the pond was about fifty feet across but low, and made chiefly of sod with very little woodwork. The lodge proved to be a fine piece of work; fully twenty-five feet in diameter and over five feet high, built on a small island, it was evidently the home of a large family of beaver.

Jack tried the old trick of giving the water a smart smack with the broad side of a paddle and then making some commotion in the water. In a few seconds, bubbles were seen rising to the surface and very soon a beaver's head appeared not more than fifteen yards away. Only for a second or two did the animal remain in sight as the wind carried to it the scent of the human beings. In its hurry to dive the beaver made only a feeble attempt at giving the warning slap with its tail.

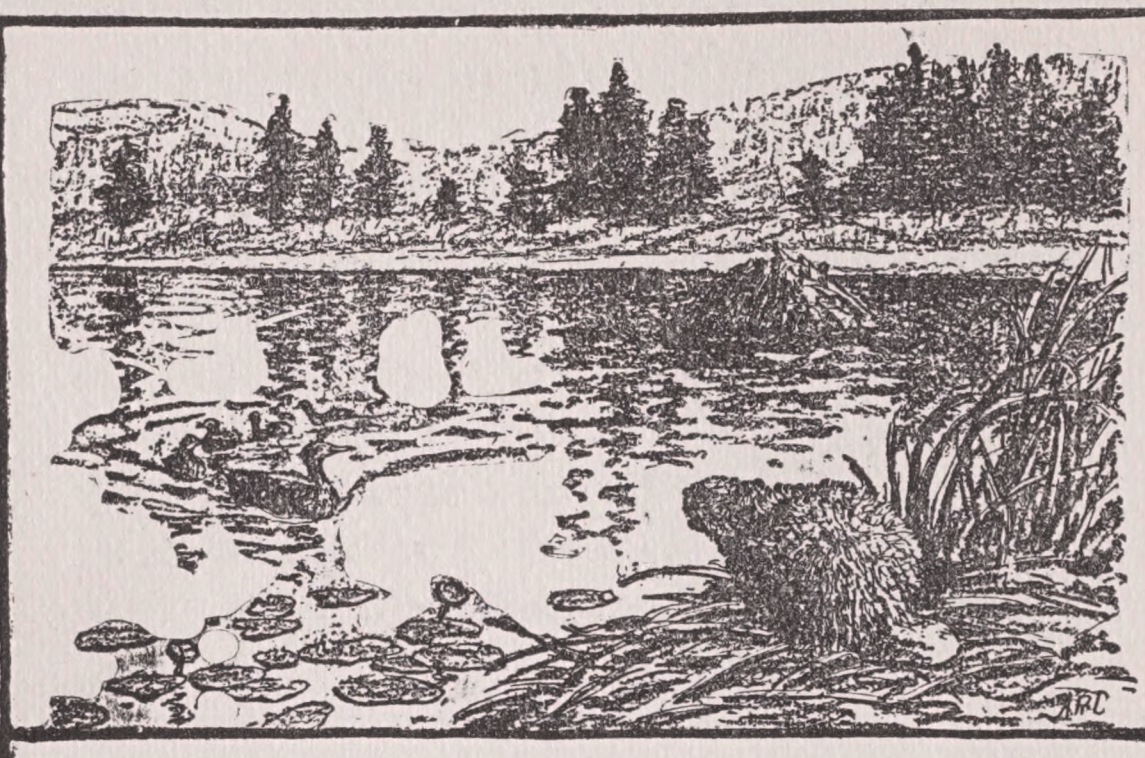
"Good-bye, old boy, you got some surprise, didn't you?" Jack called out as the frightened animal disappeared.

"Next time he will take the merganser's tip, I'm thinking," Charlie remarked, laughing. "What do you say to going ashore and striking across country toward that hill?"

"All right!" Jack replied. "That's the hill, I think, from where Gibson got his view of the smoke."

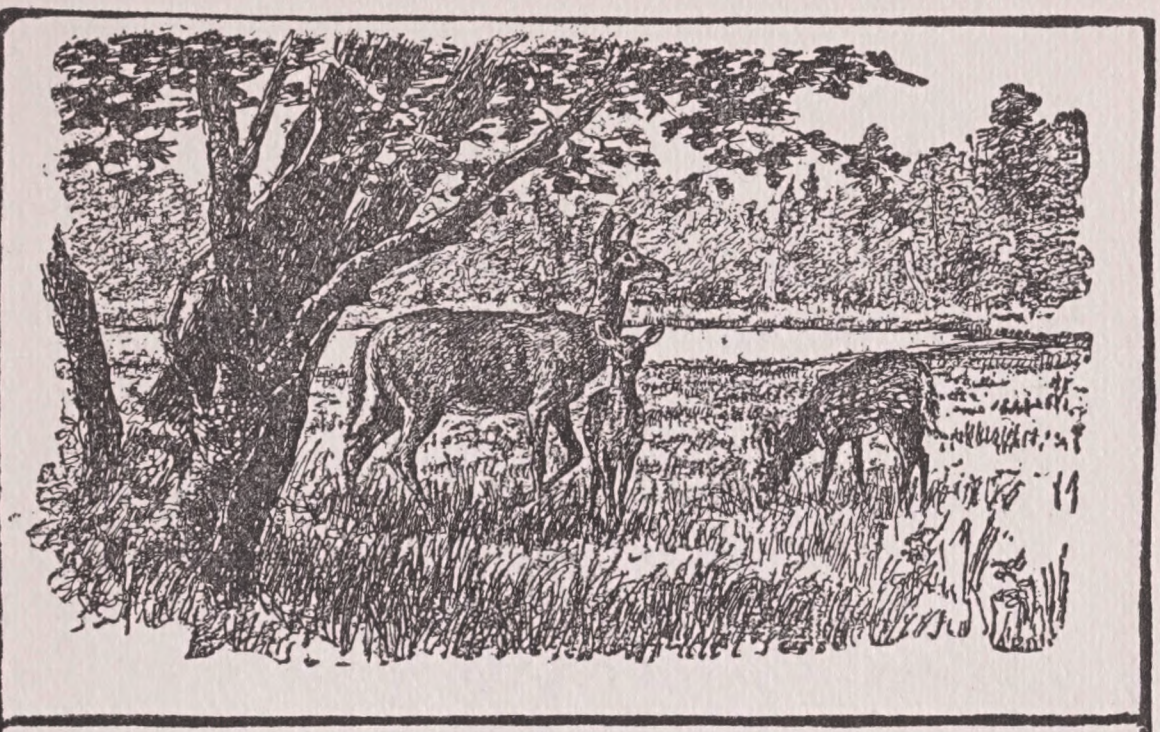
"Yes, I expect it is, but we had better keep well to the right so as to avoid the thick timber. If I remember correctly, he said there was a poplar grove near there where the beaver had been doing some tree cutting. That ought to be interesting. We'll take our lunch with us so that we need not hurry back."

On leaving the pond the country was found to be fairly good for walking, and not too wet. For the



A family of mergansers awakened the drowsy beaver

greater part it was open bog, covered with low scrub and grass, with islands of spruce and tamarack trees dotted about. Farther along the ground rose slightly and was drier and more meadow-like, with maples and poplars scattered among the other trees. Here and there was a small quiet pond by way of variety. Something was seen to move in one of the open spaces and the two boys, taking cover behind a large maple, crept through the grass until they were within a short distance of the tree. Framed by the overhanging branches was a wonderful picture. In an open beaver meadow stood a beautiful doe with her two spotted fawns. For a long time Charlie and Jack gazed speechless.



In an open beaver meadow stood a beautiful doe with her two spotted fawns

Fortunately the wind was favourable so the graceful creatures were in complete ignorance of the close proximity of the observers. And yet how constantly alert was the mother deer! A few mouthfuls of grass and up would go her head as she gazed first one way and then another for any possible enemy. Not alone to her eye-sight did she trust; her tongue frequently moistened the sensitive nose which quivered each time the head was raised with curious short jerks; the large ears turned from side to side listening intently for the slightest unusual sound. The two fawns imitated their mother in the quaintest way imaginable. One moment alert and serious, the next they were playing like chil-

dren, chasing each other as two boys might do, having a regular romp, filled with the very joy of life. It was a pity to disturb the happy family, so when they had enjoyed the sight for nearly half an hour the boys crept away leaving the animals happy and undisturbed in their meadow home.

After going back a few hundred yards they swung round to the east and then north and later came to a large poplar grove. Evidence of beaver work was to be seen everywhere but as there was nothing in the way of a pond or stream nearby it was puzzling to know where the cut wood had been taken. By following a fairly well defined beaver road the mystery was solved. The road led to a marvelous canal. Neither Jack nor Charlie had ever seen one before. They had read about them in books, but reading about a thing is so very different from actually seeing it, and their belief in these canals had been weak to say the least of it. Here, however, was the real thing, and an unusually good example of what may be considered the highest example of beaver intelligence. This canal was about four feet wide and perhaps two feet deep. The earth which had been excavated was piled up on either side in a fairly orderly way. At the end of about fifty yards there was a dam; the next stretch was slightly below the level of the first, much

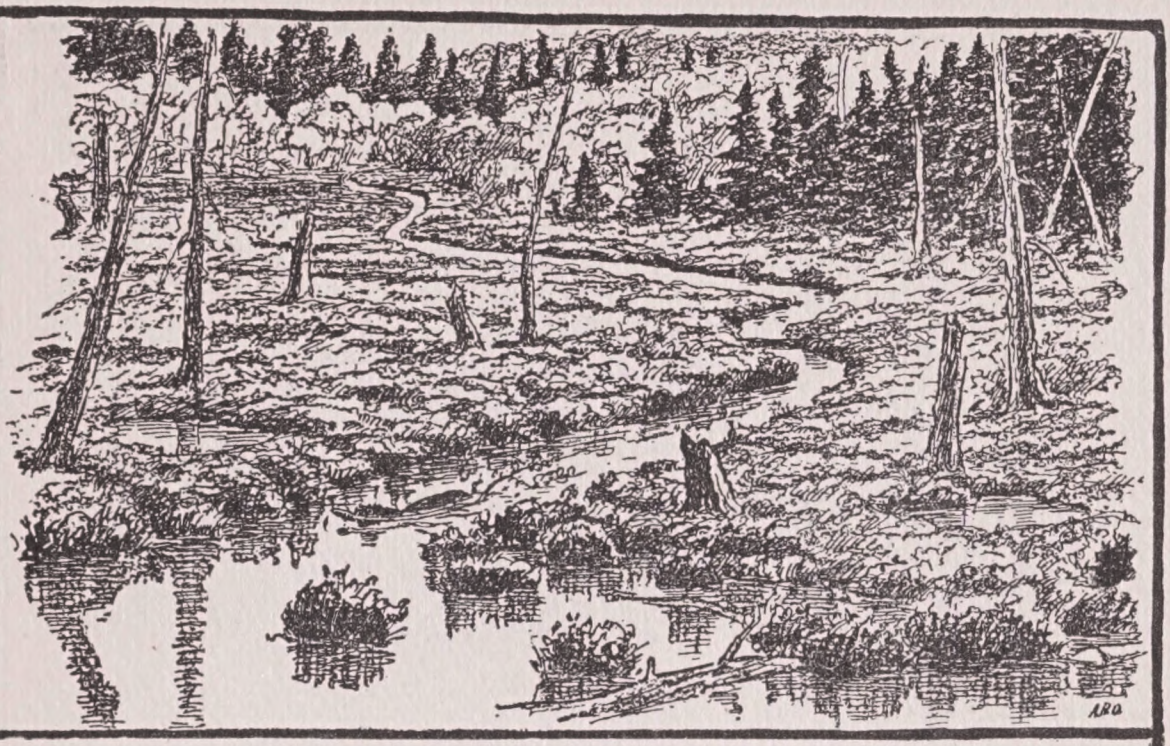
longer, being roughly about one hundred and twenty-five yards; this in turn ended at a dam; the third stretch of canal was nearly a foot below the second. This last stretch led through level and somewhat swampy ground to a large pond on either side of which was a lodge.

Not far from the canal entrance the grass was packed down as though it had been walked upon and on the bank were four beaver busily engaged on their morning toilet. By good luck a clump of alders hid the observers from view and as the wind blew from the beaver, there was not much risk of detection. The animals were more than half grown and of soft brown colour, with a touch of grayness to the heads and shoulders. Except for their broad flat tails they might have been mistaken for woodchuck or much over-grown muskrats. In combing their thick coats the favourite attitude was to sit on their tails which in this position faced forward, and comb with their hind feet. Nature has arranged a curious device to assist them in their combing operations, neither more nor less than a split nail on the second toe of the hind foot. Charlie remembered having read of this and called Jack's attention to it. The front feet or hands were also employed to some extent. All their work seemed rather purposeless, for no sooner did one get his fur perfectly fry and fluffy than he went

On the bank were four beaver

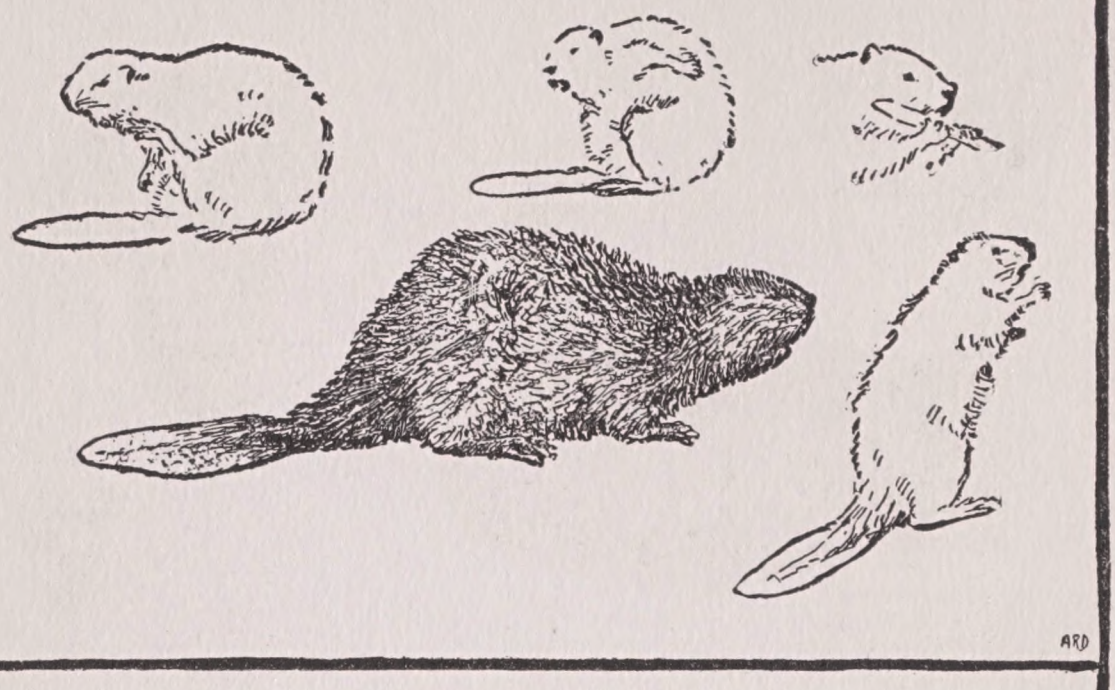
into the water for a short swim. Sometimes two or three would go in together and play games.

Nearly all wild animals especially the young, resemble children in their love for "hide-and-seek"; "catch-as-catch-can"; "King-of-the-castle", and wrestling. This family of beaver indulged in each of these games in succession, much to the amusement of the boys who for fully two hours remained watching. The afternoon was well along before the beaver left the bank and retired to the water and presumably went in the house to finish their sleep. Then the boys took another look at the canal and their amazement increased as they realized the magnitude of the work.



This canal was constructed by the beaver in order to enable them to reach the necessary supply of trees and transport the branches by water to their winter storehouse.

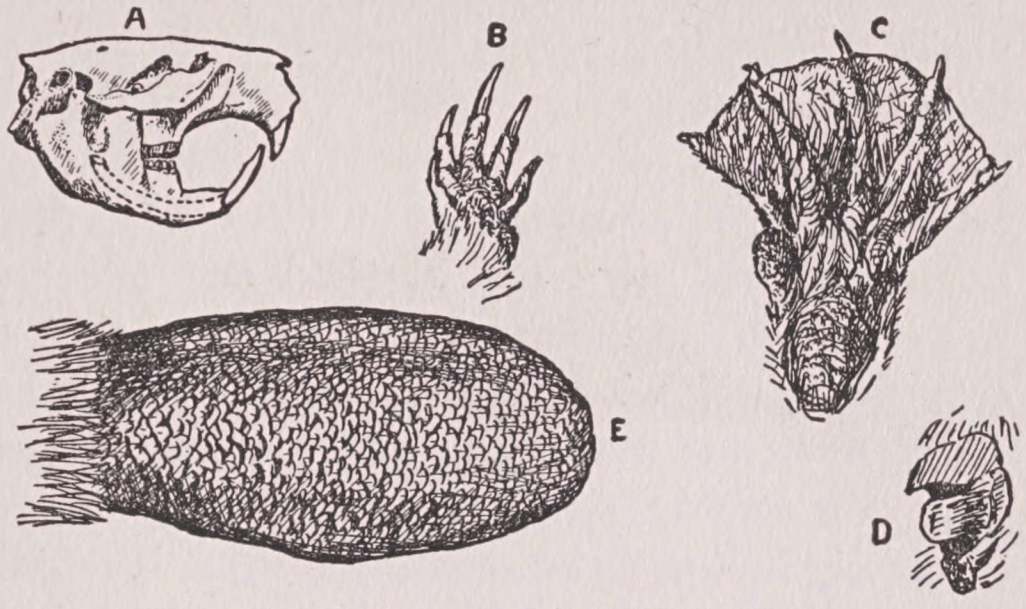
The object of the canal is to enable the beaver to reach the source of their food supply of wood. Long walks on land are dangerous to animals of their build; they cannot run fast enough to escape any of their enemies and have no method of self-defence. Water is their only safety. Therefore, when the trees in the immediate vicinity of the pond are all used, the animals have to go either farther afield for their wood or else move to another neighbourhood. Occasionally an energetic colony decides to undertake the construction of a canal, or even a system of canals, leading to the woods. In this way they are able to reach the field of oper-



The beaver, with studies of various positions

ations and transport the logs and branches by water with scarcely any danger from their natural enemies, the wolves, foxes, wolverines, and martin. As the flesh of the beaver is tender and toothsome, the wretched animals are much sought after. Hence it is that they resort to such elaborate means of protection.

The reader may wonder how trees form the food for beaver, so it might be well to explain at this point that it is only the bark, or rather the cambium layer, and not the wood which is eaten. Besides the bark of such trees as poplar, birch, ash, maple and alder (the pines and spruces and other conifers are not in demand except during the early



A—Beaver's skull, to show teeth. The dotted line indicates the length of the lower cutting teeth. B—Front foot of beaver. C—Hind foot, showing the webbing. D—The split nail of second toe on hind foot, used for combing the hair. E—The beaver's tail.

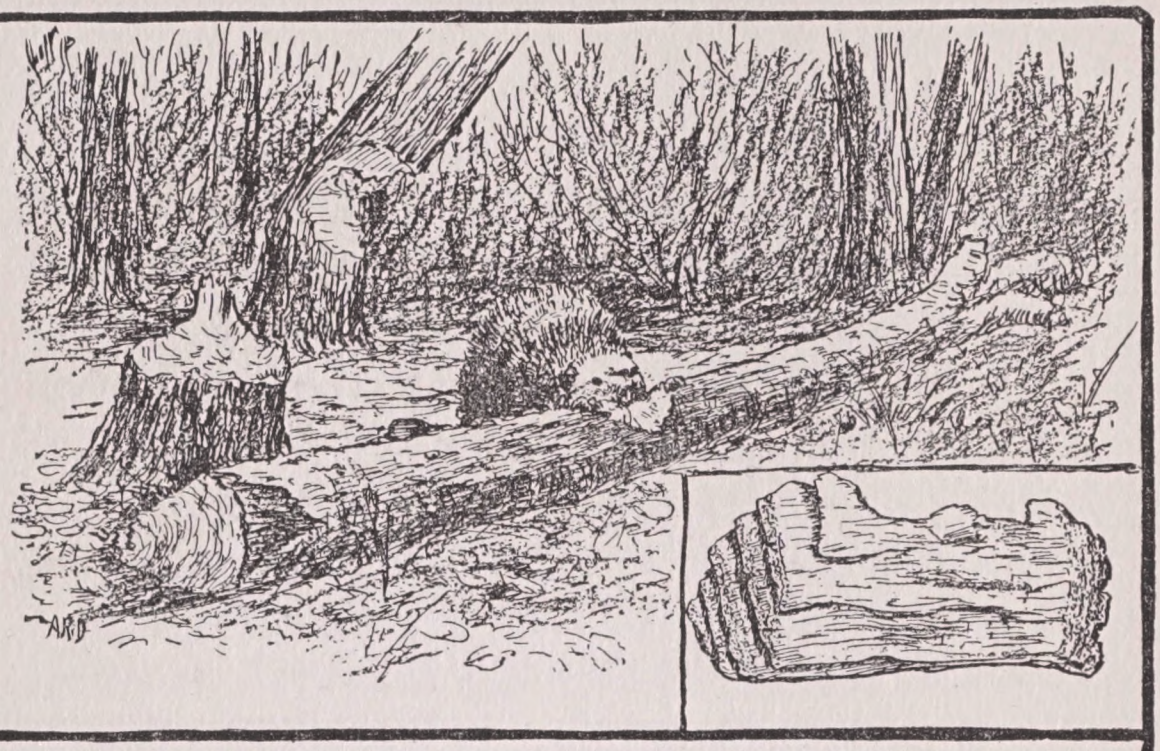
spring when the prospective mother occasionally eats spruce or hemlock bark) the roots of certain shrubs are eaten, also the roots of the aquatic plants, particularly those of the water lily and spatterdock (sometimes called the yellow water lily).

In order to obtain the branches it is of course necessary to cut down the trees as the beaver cannot climb. With their extraordinary long, sharp, chisel-like teeth they can cut down a tree of, say, nine inches in diameter in three or four hours. This gives only an approximate idea of the time

taken, because it is very seldom that any beaver works continuously at the task. Usually only a little is done at a time, except in cases of urgent need. The size of the trees that are cut is truly astonishing. The largest tree of which I can find any record was about one hundred and twenty-five inches in circumference and was probably a cotton tree, which is a very soft wood; it is not at all uncommon to find stumps with a circumference of sixty or seventy inches. The usual size, however, is scarcely half as much. When the tree is felled, the branches are all cut off and then cut to sizes convenient for handling. When this has been done the thinner part of the trunk is cut into sections varying in length according to the diameter. For example, a log of five inches in diameter might be as much as eight or ten feet long and yet be easily dragged to the water, but one of twice that size would be too heavy to handle and so would be cut to less than half the length of the smaller one.

All the wood is taken by water transport, when possible, and piled up in the water outside the lodge. How the branches and logs are fastened to the bottom of lake or river no one knows for certain, but they are secured in some mysterious way, and the pile, with its top showing at the surface is sometimes as much as forty feet across. This wood is used as a winter supply. During the winter in

most parts of the animals' habitat, the lakes and even rivers are coated with ice which may be as much as three feet or even more in thickness. The beaver is thus imprisoned as long as the ice lasts which is usually about four months. The lodge or house has its only entrances well under water, so that once the ice is formed, the beaver on coming out of his house can only move about *under* water. When food is needed he comes out, cuts off a likely branch and takes it into the lodge. There he eats off the bark in comfort and, as space is strictly limited, the peeled stick is immediately taken out and left to float under the ice. Later it is used for building material in the construction of the lodges or dams. Many animals store food for winter use and some show remarkable ingenuity in their methods, but I doubt if any creature except man works out the problem with greater thoroughness and cleverness than our friend the beaver. He seems to think of everything and plan his work far ahead, and very seldom does he make any very bad mistakes. Of course such marvellous work has caught the imagination of many writers, and some remarkable fiction has resulted. If they were not pathetic such stories would be funny, but it is a pity that the almost human work accomplished by the beaver should be made ridiculous. The absurd part is that there



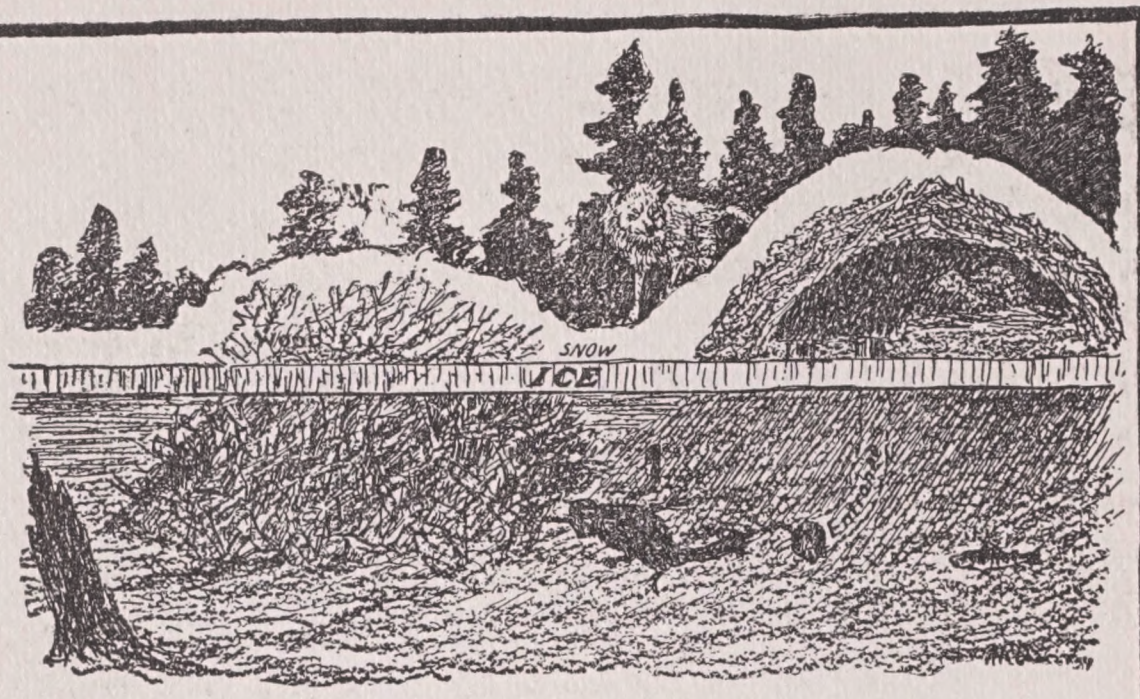
When a tree is cut down the branches are first taken and then the trunk if not too large is cut into sections of size suitable for carrying

is absolutely no reason to resort to fiction. The truth is usually far more wonderful *and* logical than the silly stories which have been offered to the public from time to time, stories usually written by those who have not sufficient interest in their subject to go out into the wilds where they may study the animal by personal observation. Of course it is far cheaper to sit at home in a comfortable chair and read what some other man has written and then add touches here and there, till what originally might have been true, becomes a series of distorted stories. Travelling off into the wilds frequently means considerable expense and nearly always a certain amount of hardship. But

One beaver bringing branch to the winter woodpile while another is diving down with his contribution

one fact learned directly from nature is worth hundreds of *hearsay* facts.

In case the reader wishes to know why the beaver have the entrances to their houses under water and why they make dams, the diagram shown will perhaps explain to some extent the reasons. But the following points may be noted: First, the entrance being under water renders the inside of the house safe from unwelcome visitors. Secondly, it allows the animals to come out in safety during the winter to visit their wood pile. Thirdly, the water must be maintained at a constant level; otherwise during the dry season the entrance might be exposed, while in very wet weather floods would render the lodge



Section of beaver lodge in winter when the animals are imprisoned by the ice. Their food is obtained from the woodpile stored during the autumn

uninhabitable. The only way to accomplish this is by means of a dam. This conserves the water in dry weather and as it has usually a wide enough lip to let all surplus water escape, the variation in the level of the water varies but a few inches throughout the year.

The size of the dams varies from tiny ones not more than a few inches long with a pound or so of material used, up to huge structures two thousand feet or more in length and up to about fourteen feet in height containing hundreds of *tons* of material. Needless to say these large dams are not deliberately planned to be of such size. Nor is the building all done at one time. It is a very gradual piece

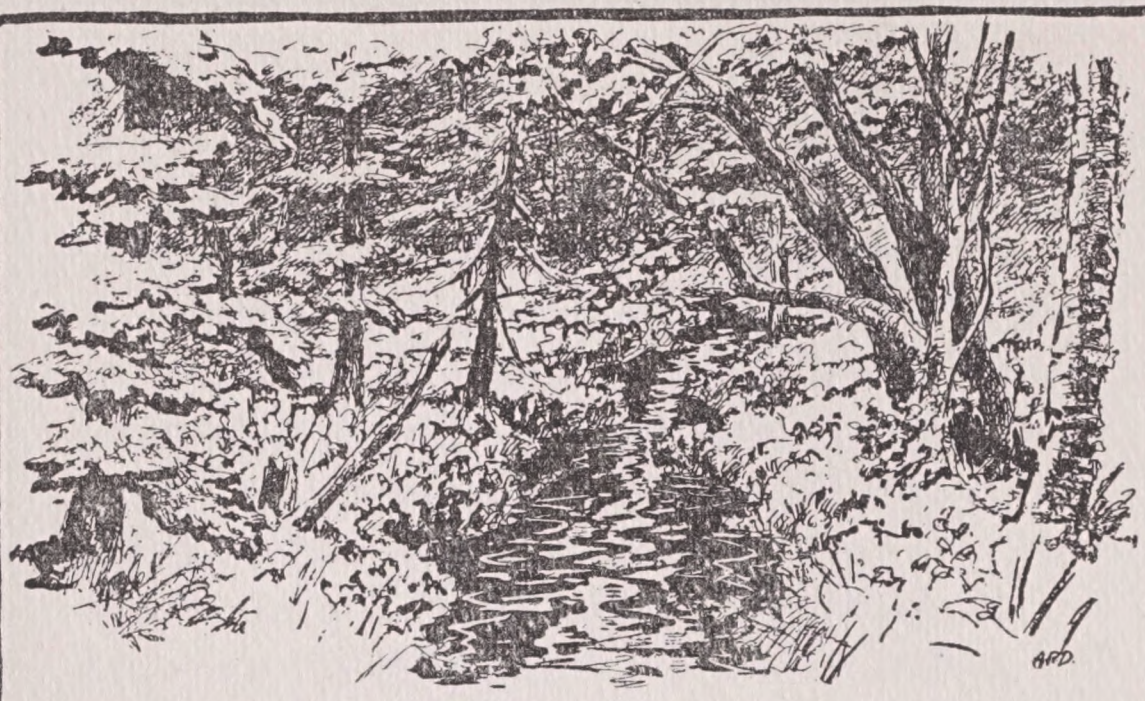
A typical example of a beaver pond with one large or main dam and two secondary or subsidiary dams to be used in case of emergency

of work, commencing with perhaps a comparatively insignificant dam of a few feet in length and being added to year by year. As the colony grows and needs more food, a greater area of water is required in order to allow the beaver to reach the timber. This means increasing the length and height of the dam. As time goes on the supply of accessible food trees becomes exhausted so the beaver leave the large pond they have made and used for a number of years, and seek a new part of the country in which to establish themselves. Whether the whole colony, which may number thirty or forty animals, moves as a colony is very doubtful. Cases of where they have done so are on record,

but I think it is more usual for the different families to seek out each their own new home. After a lapse of ten or twelve or more years a new growth of poplars and other soft wood trees has had time to appear, bringing a fresh supply of beaver food. But the dam not having been kept in repair during these years, has broken down and become overgrown with shrubs. In some cases all outward semblance of the original structure will be lost after ten years of neglect. Some wandering pair of beaver out in search of a suitable place to start a home will come across this abandoned pond and settle down in the very place that their great-great-grandfather may have lived, and they will reconstruct the dam and add to it year by year as their family increases until once again a great pond reflects the beauty of the surrounding hills on its smooth surface and the sound of cutting wood and falling trees is heard during the cool autumn nights.

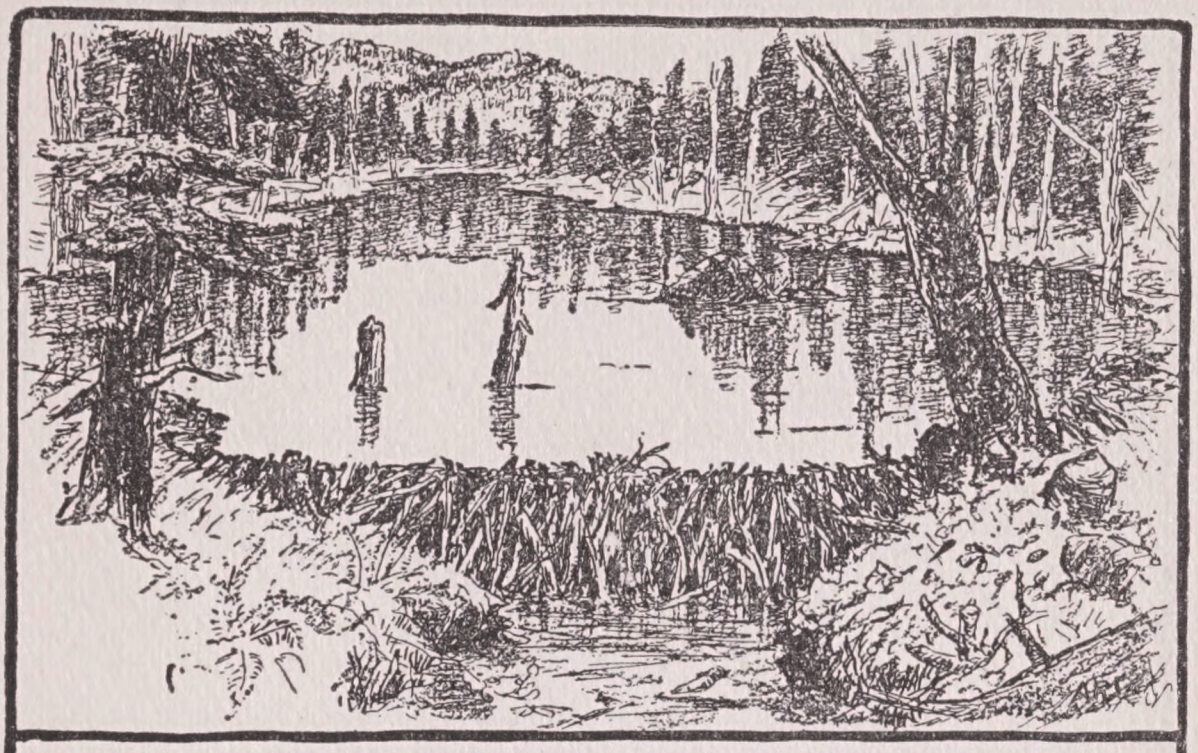
So it is that the same pond may come into use again and again for centuries. When a long used pond is finally abandoned an interesting transformation of the land is observed, but let us first look at the conditions obtaining at the time the beaver began to change the landscape to suit their needs. A stream, small or large as the case may be, runs through a wooded valley. The stream is not conspicious as its banks are overgrown by

trees and bushes. There is probably little or no open country on either side. The exploring beaver have examined the situation and found it favourable. There is sufficient water and an ample supply of food trees. They build a dam in what they consider the most suitable position and flood an acre or two of the woodland. The most convenient soft wood trees are cut down and used for food. The firs, spruces, pines, hemlocks and tamarack are left standing, and soon die as the water rises and suffocates them. Their whitened skeletons stand for a few years and then decay and fall into the water. In the natural course of events the beaver increase in numbers, and more wood is required for food; so the dam is lengthened and made higher in proportion, and the pond broadens out so that it reaches the uncut trees. As it becomes larger the pressure on the dam is of course greater. Should it break under this increasing weight of water, the pond would rush away leaving the animals and their lodges at the mercy of any passing enemy. To safeguard themselves against such a catastrophe a subsidiary or supporting dam is built a short distance below the main structure, and to make still more certain another or even several more may be added. Should the main dam break any one of these lesser structures would offer a place of shelter in their small ponds. Another



The beginning and end of a beaver colony, and how it affects us. First stage: before the beaver come . . .

way in which these subsidiaries are useful is that they are a protection against the action of frost at the base of the dam. By raising the water several feet the frost is unable to reach the base. Our growing colony does whatever work is necessary and thrives accordingly. The pond grows until it reaches the proportions of a lake. Hundreds of acres of former forest land are covered and gradually the dead conifers vanish under the natural process of decay. All of this takes many many years, and all this time the rains and melting snows have been busy washing down from the surrounding hillside the millions of gaily coloured leaves that have fallen every autumn, not only the leaves but



The beginning and end of a beaver colony, and how it affects us. Second stage: the stream has been dammed by the beaver; . . .

all other dead vegetation. The stream, too, brings down its contribution without ceasing day and night, year after year, and all of this settles in the lake and forms a more or less level layer of rich humus.

The day comes at last when the lake is abandoned, probably because the food supply has failed; this may be due to the natural results of too many beaver and consequent destruction of the trees or perhaps a fire has devastated the region. Or again, man, the destroyer, may have done his deadly work and trapped the entire colony. Whatever the cause the place is left to remake itself. Nature is never idle. Now she soon starts on the dam, there being no industrious little engineers to

The beginning and end of a beaver colony and how it affects us. Third stage: the beaver have left their pond . . .

keep it in repair; she plants trees and shrubs along the neat bank and their roots soon open up the packed earthwork and the water, eager to escape, creeps through the tiny openings and enlarges them more and more. The lake gets lower and lower as the dam crumbles away; soon a large flat treeless swamp takes the place of the great expanse of shimmering water. Slowly this dries up as the water once again make its way along the long disused bed of the stream. Under the action of the summer sun and the autumn winds the drying process continues while the winter frosts plough the land in nature's own way. Gradually the heavy, rich vegetable mould is made

The beginning and end of a beaver colony, and how it affects us. Fourth stage: the settler finds the meadow and turns it into a farm

ready for its crop of grass, the natural pasture land of the deer.

Thus we see the transformation from woodland to lake, from lake to swamp, from swamp to meadow and finally man comes along in search of a suitable homestead. He finds this wonderful meadow, ready made, watered by a clear stream and surrounded by wooded hills and he settles there. His children play hide-and-seek on the ground where the little beaver used to play the same game in the water perhaps a hundred years before, and the settler does not know that he owes his finest land to the efforts of the apparently insignificant beaver.

CHAPTER IX

The camp pets and their peculiarities; how the winter affects some birds and animals; another trip to the canal; the early bird; sketching the moose; a trip down the river for bass; meet an Indian and buy a birch bark canoe.

CHARLIE and Jack returned to Four Island Camp thoroughly satisfied with the day's experiences. It had been one of those days when everything had gone particularly well. They had seen an example of the most interesting work done by the beaver and they determined to pay many visits to the canal later on when the autumn work began. During the summer months the beaver spend a lazy time. Little or no construction work is undertaken, until the days begin to shorten and the forests change their clothing from the many shades of green to the gorgeous colouring which is the last joyous note before the long dreary winter settles on the northern country.

Big-ears greeted the boys on their arrival as though glad to have his human companions with him again. He hopped about their feet in his

quaint way, often stopping and sitting up to beg for bits of food. The jays too, added their note of welcome. All of which gave the camp a delightful home-like feeling. It is curious what a pleasure we derive from an animal or bird showing confidence in us. We seem to take it as a personal compliment and it flatters our vanity. I have often thought that one of the proudest moments of my life was when, for the first time, I induced a little warbler to come and sit on my hand. It gave a thrill of pleasure difficult to describe, and still more difficult to analyze. Jack said he always felt an extraordinary pleasure each time his particular pet jay came to him, and yet these Canada jays are the most easily tamed and confiding of all wild creatures. This jay they named Fluff, and it suited him thoroughly, as he was a ball of soft gray and white fluff, from which his dark eyes gleamed like shining black beads. He had a fascinating way of cocking his head to one side whenever he wanted anything, looking into Jack's face with a quizzical expression which seemed to say "won't you give it to me—please." Of course Jack could not refuse. Several other jays were exceedingly tame, but none of them had the delightful confiding way that Fluff possessed. The little rascal soon felt himself to be a privileged character and frequently objected to others of his kind becoming too familiar. He

Fluff, the Canada jay, would sit on Jack's hand and share the food in a most familiar way

scolded vigorously if another jay sat on Jack's shoulder but strange to say did not object to any of them making friends with Charlie. Nearly all animals and birds that become at all tame are apt to take a strong fancy for a particular person and become frantically jealous of their affection. Their pronounced dislikes are equally noticeable. Sometimes Jack, with a boy's love of teasing, would pretend to take special notice of Greedy, as one of the jays was called, on account of its insatiable appetite. If he continued this for more than a few seconds, Fluff would go for his rival with a good round of abuse and, if this produced no effect, would fly up to a particular broken branch and sit there

The crafty lynx hid behind a tree and waited for the hare to resume his evening meal

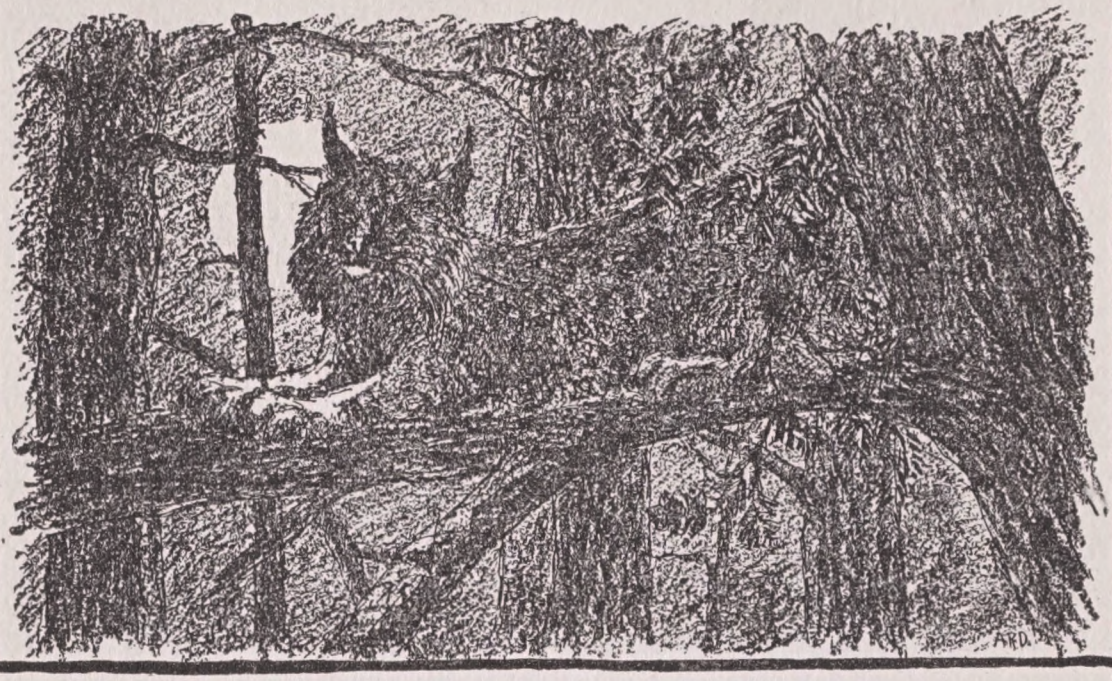
looking utterly disgusted with life and repeating a soft plaintive note at regular intervals. This always had the desired effect. Jack would put up his head and call Fluff by name. Like a great gray moth the bird would drift rather than fly down from the branch and crooning a soft murmur song alight on Jack's outstretched hand.

It is scarcely to be wondered at that Fluff became a much spoiled pet. That he would have to be left behind when they returned to the land of bricks and mortar was a sad thought, yet he could not be taken with them owing to the restriction imposed by law on caged birds in the United States. There was at least the satisfaction that the bird was not in great

danger of being killed. Natural enemies were not very numerous, and the food question during the trying winter months was usually solved by the jays, thanks to their forethought in storing food in all sorts of queer places among the trees. As soon as the cold weather threatens, the days are spent by the birds industriously laying up their supplies. How they ever find what they have hidden is a mystery, because very small amounts are put in a single place, so there must be hundreds, if not thousands, of these caches. The rough shaggy bark of the birch trees is one of the most popular hiding places, but holes in trees are not used so much, probably on account of the red squirrels. The jay's chance of surviving the winter was far better than poor Big-ears. The hare is a tempting morsel for many of the flesh-eating animals. When the deadly cold sets in and the woods are covered with their burden of snow the hare has to work hard for his food. Every hour that he is out feeding, in spite of constant vigilance, there is danger lurking near. Among his enemies the chief ones are the wolf, fox, mink, martin, wolverine and lynx. Of these the lynx is perhaps the most dangerous. It requires little imagination to picture the night scenes that are enacted with such unhappy frequency. The lynx wants food, and he starts out when the woods are wrapped in deceptive darkness.

Silently as death his big padded feet carry him along. His ghostly gray figure merges into the indistinct background. He hunts by sound and sight, as all the cats do, rather than by the sense of smell which enables the wolves and others of their relations to trail their prey so unerringly. Once the lynx sights poor bunny he is in no hurry. With crafty patience he watches his victim until a suitable opportunity occurs to make a short sharp spring. Seldom indeed does the spring fail, and one more animal has given his life to another according to the relentless law decreed by the strange guiding hand of nature. Apparently every living thing is put on this earth especially for some other living thing. The beginning and end of this chain is difficult to find. The hare may seem to us just as important as the lynx, yet it is the duty of the hare to furnish food for the lynx. Complacently the lynx, having dined well, retires to a comfortable branch while the moon looks on without comment.

Charlie would often take Big-ears on his lap and tell him of the dangers of woods and warn him particularly against those enemies that would be on watch for him at all times. The little animal took all the advice very quietly and appreciated it all the more if a cracker or piece of bread were added by way of seasoning. Nature had provided him with a sense called instinct, which is very well

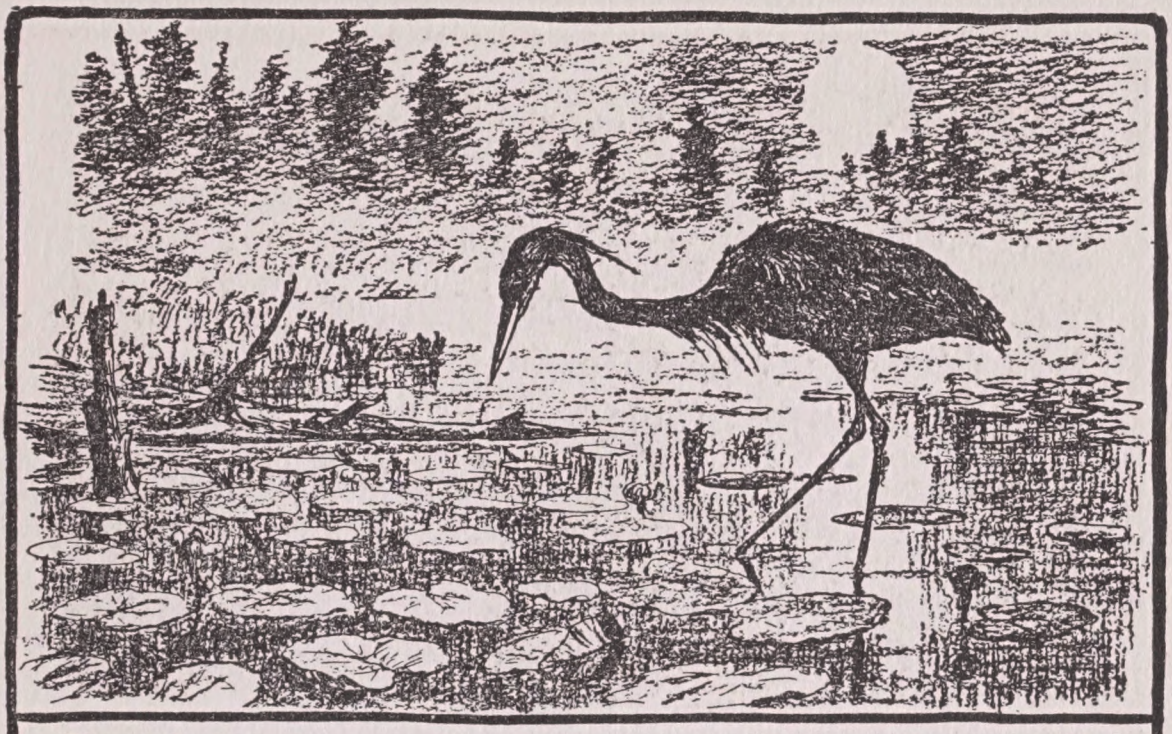


The lynx, having dined well, retires to a comfortable branch for a rest

developed in the direction of self-preservation. The degree of this instinct is curiously well balanced according to nature's plan so that the hunted must be a shade less clever than the hunter. Otherwise the hunter would go hungry and soon die out, and the whole scheme of life would have to be changed. But Charlie hoped his little friend would not fall a victim to any of the hungry prowlers.

"What do you say to taking another trip toward the beaver canal to-morrow, if the weather is fine?" said Charlie one evening while they were enjoying some particularly good trout fishing in their lake.

"I'm game for it, but let us make a very early



The early fisherman searching for frogs or small fish which are the chief food of the heron

start. We shall be more likely to meet some of the moose and deer and it's jolly being out before the morning mists have cleared."

This met with Charlie's approval. The following morning, while the sun was trying to send its rays through the filmy vapour, the two boys left camp and paddled across the lake to one of the small ponds. In the shallow water near the shore a heron was seen walking along with head held low searching for his breakfast. This early fisherman was so intent on his work that he had not noticed the canoe coming through the tall grass. In a strange, jerky way he made his way among the floating lily leaves, stopping now and then to

seize some luckless frog or small fish in his long, powerful beak. Each time a wriggling morsel was caught, the bird held his head high, and down the long stretched neck the dainty tit-bit would vanish; then after a moment's hesitation to make sure it had gone all the way down the hunt would proceed. While the boys were watching, the heron caught a particularly large bull-frog. The frog thoroughly objected and struggled vigorously. This was too much for Charlie. He jumped up and slapped the water with a paddle. The surprised heron instantly dropped his prize and after a moment's look at the cause of the disturbance gave a squawk and spreading his huge gray wings flew away with an air of utter disgust.

"Rough on the old bird, I suppose," Jack remarked.

"Yes, but good luck for the poor old frog, Jack."

Jack laughed as he replied: "I suppose that heron considers himself the early bird and so deserves the worm."

"That's all right, but what about the worm, or, the frog as it was in this case? He was up still earlier, and *he* got caught. I object to that proverb or whatever you call it, as it gets things twisted. It praises the early bird for being up early while the poor unfortunate worm gets left for having left his earthy bed at a still more ridicul-

ously early hour. I was told once of a fellow who was very lazy, and hated to get up. He had a brother who was the shining example of the family and was up always at some unseemly hour. One day this early Johnny went out for a walk before any one was up. On his way he picked up a purse or some bank notes and came home very pleased with himself. His fond Mamma thought it a good opportunity to go for her lazy son. She routed him out and showed him the money saying: 'See what the early bird gets!'

"Master Lazy Bones rubbed his eyes and remarked: 'Seems to me that if the other fellow had not been up so blamed early he would not have lost the money' and with that wise reply he turned over and went to sleep, satisfied that there was not much in the early bird idea."

"Charlie, your story is highly immoral, and you are altogether too literal. Let's cross the pond which you have disturbed so completely and go in the direction of the canal."

Instead of going as they had done on their previous visit, they kept more to the right with the intention of examining some ponds which would be likely places for moose. In the first of these some ducks were found, while the second one showed no signs of life except a couple of muskrats. But as they approached the third and largest, they

saw a moose's back showing above the low grass which bordered the water. As the wind was not entirely favourable it was decided to go back a little and approach directly against what little breeze there was. There was plenty of cover; the stalking was simple enough; and very soon they were within fifty or sixty yards of the pond. The cow moose was complacently munching spatterdock leaves* and stalks while on the grassy shore lay her calf, a quaint little creature with a distinctly reddish coat.

"Let us wait here till the youngster stands up so that we can be sure whether or not he has spots," Jack whispered as they squatted behind a small clump of willows.

"No doubt about the red colour, is there? But I don't see any spots. I expect that account in the book must have been wrong. I say what a picture they make! I'm going to make a sketch of it all," and Charlie who had brought his sketch book with him, took it out and began to work industriously. All the time the ungainly old animal kept on feeding. Sometimes she strayed out into the middle of the pond where the water was so deep that only her head and the top of her shoulders were visible. Occasionally some tempting

*The moose does not eat the roots of the spatterdock as is commonly supposed.—*Author.*

morsel induced her to go completely out of her depth and she would stay submerged for minutes at a time. After an hour or two had passed the calf began to feel hungry and lonely. He stood up and called for his mother, but at first she paid no attention to her offspring, until at last the little fellow went into the water. This aroused the parent and she came ashore slowly, stopping now and then to get a mouthful of leaves. As soon as the calf had satisfied its hunger the pair left the lake and came directly toward the two boys, who remained motionless to see what would happen. Nearer and nearer they came and not until they were within seven or eight yards did they discover the presence of the two crouching figures. Owing to the direction of the wind they were unable to detect the human scent and stood staring in a stupid way until Charlie burst out laughing. This was too much for Mrs. Moose, who turned and bolted at full speed, her long swinging stride taking her across the bog with extraordinary rapidity, while the red calf followed close behind.

"Well, there's one thing certain! There are no spots on that calf," said Charlie.

"That proves the book was wrong as we expected. What shall we do now?"

"I'll stay on here a bit and finish this sketch, and then it will be about lunch time. After that

we'll see how we feel. Personally I don't abound in energy. The air feels as though we are in for a thunder storm."

"Just what I think. Those clouds over there look a bit suspicious," Jack replied.

For nearly an hour Charlie worked at his sketch then they had lunch. By that time the clouds had rolled up promising a storm within a short time and the boys thought it better to start back for camp. Before they had gone more than half way to where the canoe had been left, the first drops of rain fell, and the thunder could be heard rumbling in the distance. To avoid getting soaked the two ran as fast as they could over the irregular ground and reached the canoe just as the storm broke with full fury. There was nothing for it but to make the best of things, so the canoe was turned upside down to give as much shelter as possible. This was only a makeshift, but they managed to keep their bodies more or less dry though their legs were soaked. After the actual thunder storm had passed the rain continued for several hours much to the boys' disgust, and it was nearly sunset by the time they could return to camp.

A few days later, after caching the food supply, in case of another visit from the thief, a trip down to the river was undertaken, with the hope that there would be a message from Gibson and Cooper,

but nothing was found in the "letter box." Charlie wrote a message saying that they were going up the river for a day or two and left this with letters for home in case Cooper should pass that way. Then they started up the river. Nothing very exciting occurred for the first few hours. Presently they came to where the river broadened out into a lake of fair size; on the west side the water was covered with lily pads and looked like a good place for bass. As it was too late in the year to use flies with much chance of success, medium sized spoons with red and white feathers were used, and most satisfactory they proved. Few fish give better sport than black bass, especially with a light fly rod.

Charlie and Jack took turns at the fishing and had wonderful fun for two or three hours. The fish took the spoons readily and fought vigorously. All that were lightly hooked were released (a small single hook was used with each spoon, in place of the regular gang of three which gives the fish no chance at all) and yet enough were caught to furnish plenty of food for two days. The bass made a very welcome change from trout which had been their principal food for some time.

Camp was made in a sheltered cove at the north end of the lake. It was appropriately christened "Bull Moose Camp" because an enormous moose was found in the cove, and it carried the finest

The mother moose fed contentedly in the pond while her red calf rested nearby

horns that either of the boys had yet seen except in collections. These horns were almost fully grown, even the points reaching full length. As it was yet early in August the velvet still covered the great growth of horn and added to their apparent size.

While eating breakfast the following morning, the boys were surprised to see the indistinct form of something moving on the water; gradually it became clearer, as from out of the gray mist came an Indian, silently paddling his bark canoe. He landed near the camp and came ashore with a quiet greeting in excellent English. Evidently he was a rather superior Indian and Jack asked him to join them and have some breakfast. He

From out of the gray mist came an Indian, silently paddling his bark canoe

proved to be a most interesting man, had been through college, and was now returning from a trip up country among some of the more primitive of his race from whom he wished to collect data on folk lore.

Jack had noticed the unusually fine bark canoe and wondered whether it could be bought. He broached the subject as tactfully as possible, and was delighted when the Indian readily agreed to sell it for a reasonable sum if he could be taken down to the steamer landing. This was easily arranged by accompanying him down the river. Their own canoe they could leave with the people at the landing place, until the Sylvesters arrived and it would

be all ready for them to use. As this arrangement was satisfactory to all concerned, they lost no time in striking camp and starting down the river. In passing the entrance to MacPherson's trail, a new note was substituted for the former one and the letters handed to the Indian who promised to post them at Beaver Town.

The journey down the river was easily and quickly accomplished and the following evening found them at their destination, where arrangements were made for taking care of the canvas canoe till September the tenth, when the Sylvesters would arrive.

Charlie and Jack were delighted to find themselves the proud owners of the beautiful birch bark. It was a thing they had always longed to possess and though really no easier to paddle than the canvas one it had the advantage of being a trifle lighter and much more readily repaired in case of damage. With the aid of a little melted pitch and a piece of bark or even canvas a fair sized hole could be mended securely in a few minutes.

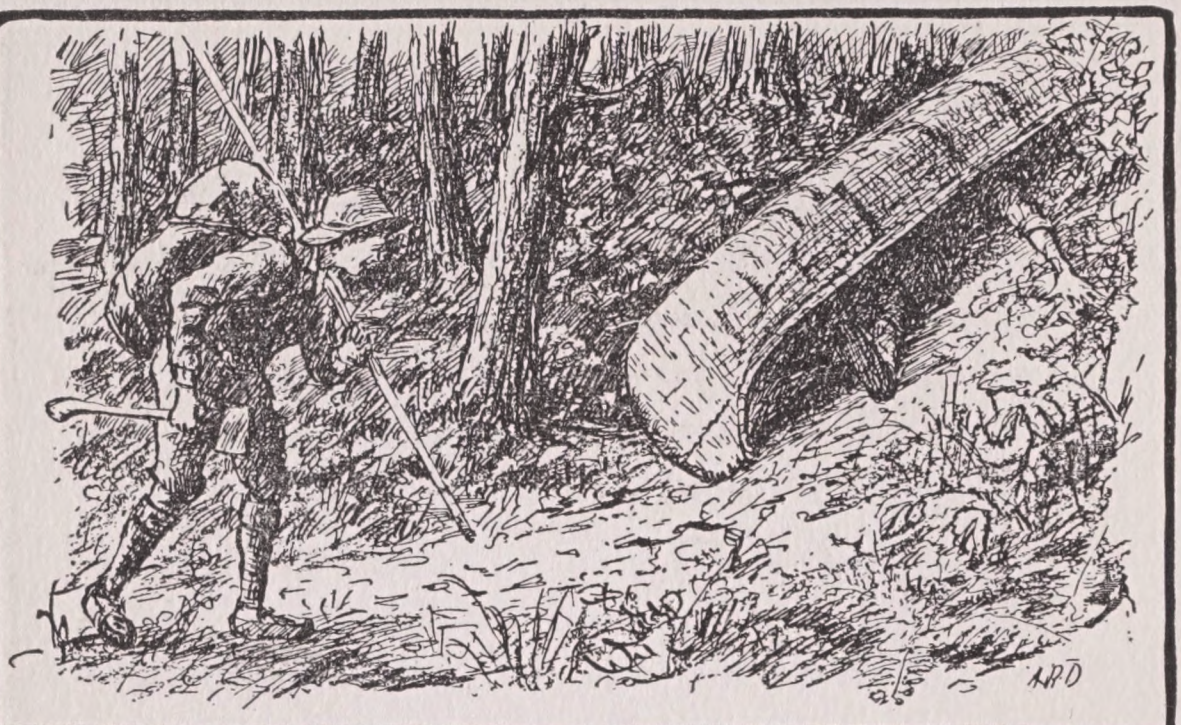
As they were about to start off in the canoe with the intention of returning to camp, Charlie was struck with the idea that this would be a good opportunity to get some supplies from Beaver Town. By doing so they would greatly reduce the

loads to be carried when the rest of the family arrived.

"Jolly good idea, Charlie," Jack replied when he heard the suggestion. "Then, when Dad and the others come, we shall be in such a blessed hurry to take them to the camp that we won't want to carry any extra loads, let alone make double carries. It will also be a good chance to get whatever letters there may be for us."

So it was arranged, and they went by the steamer which left a few hours later. At Beaver Town they found that there was no news from Cooper and Gibson. This was very disappointing, but perhaps it meant that they were on the trail. Having secured nearly all the food stuffs that would be necessary for the family's use during their visit, they returned with their load to Four Island Camp, and arrived five days later.

On their way over MacPherson's trail they had an amusing experience, at least it was amusing from Jack's point of view. Owing to the dry weather the dead leaves made the ground very slippery. Charlie was coming down a fairly steep bank carrying the bark canoe, when suddenly his feet slipped from under him and he came sliding down the bank with the canoe on top of him. It is scarcely to be wondered at that Jack roared with laughter as he turned and saw only a pair of feet and



Charlie slipped down the smooth bank and lay there completely covered by the canoe, much to Jack's amusement

a hand sticking up from under the boat. Charlie too was laughing so hard that he could scarcely extricate himself from his ignominious and extinguished position.

The day following their return to camp they were busily engaged in putting the supplies away when Jack caught sight of a moose swimming in the lake, and called Charlie who immediately said:

"Let's go out and see if we can get alongside. It would be rather good fun." No sooner said than done. The canoe was pushed into the lake and off they went at full speed. The moose seeing them coming made every effort to reach the shore, with the result that there was a regular race, and the

Charlie enjoys a ride on the young bull moose

boys had to use their utmost effort to overtake the young bull. This they finally succeeded in doing and Jack, holding on to its mane, let the animal tow them along. Charlie seeing a chance for some sport called out:

"Hang on while I get my moccasins off, and I'll have a ride." He quickly got rid of all superfluous clothing and then slid out right on to the moose's back. The scared animal gave a sudden burst of speed and Charlie found himself floundering in the water. His companion picked him up and then the two paddled as hard as they could and just managed to get between the shore and the moose, and succeeded in turning him. A few

minutes later Charlie made another try and this time managed to secure a firm seat on his novel steed, very much to the disgust and alarm of that steed. Jack laughed so much that he could not keep up with the wonderful swimmer that despite his unusual load made most marvellous speed. Charlie hanging on to the long mane was trying to decide whether to get off in the water or take a chance of making a landing. Just what the animal would do when he got ashore no one could say. The chances were that he would be far too frightened to do anything but bolt for the woods. Charlie thought he would stick on as long as he could, while the moose, gasping for breath, made for the nearest shore which happened to be low and marshy with no trees near enough to be dangerous. Very soon shallow water was reached and the daring rider had all he could do to keep his seat when the animal began to touch soft bottom. Soon he found better foothold and gave a sudden burst of speed and before Charlie knew what had happened he found himself floundering in the shallow muddy water not deep enough for swimming and too muddy for walking, while the moose relieved of the load sprinted away at his best speed. For a time Charlie struggled without success and finally lay on his back and waited for the canoe.

"A fine horseman, *you* are!" was Jack's heartless

greeting, "getting dumped in the mud by a rotten little bull moose. What a filthy mess you are in. I think I shall have to tow you out into deeper water to get cleaned off." Charlie was too winded to speak and had all he could do to clamber into the canoe

"Well, I think once is enough for that trick, Jack, but it really was awful good sport! If only I had not been such an ass as to try to make a landing. Great Caesar! He nearly broke my back! As a water steed he is fine, but on land—no, thank you, never again!"

"Oh, but I do wish I had got a photo of you when you went off. It really was funny, and what a grand splash you made."

"Glad you enjoyed yourself, even if it was at my expense. Now, if you are quite ready, we'll go back to camp as I rather imagine my clothes are damp, and I must get rid of some of this black mud."

CHAPTER X

The boys discover a porcupine eating their best paddle; Charlie also discovers to his cost that the animals are well armed. The porcupine and some of his habits. The Sylvesters arrive and are delighted with the camp. They visit the beaver ponds and Evelyn has an amusing experience with a bull-frog.

THE August days were drawing to a close. Only two weeks to wait before the Sylvesters were due. Four Island Camp must be made as attractive as possible so the boys devoted much of their time to making all sorts of improvements and to cutting a sufficient supply of fire wood to last for a full month.

The various beaver colonies were visited and in several of them the animals had begun to do a little preliminary work, mostly in the way of repairing dams and lodges. One entirely new dam was discovered. It was the beginning of a colony and thus afforded the boys the greatest interest, as they would have an opportunity of seeing the pond grow from the actual beginning. By the end of their

stay the little colony would probably be in full working order.

In commending the dam it was observed that there appeared to be no particular reason for having selected the site. The stream was about twenty feet wide, and in this a few alders were laid with the thick ends up stream so that the branches caught in the muddy bottom and acted as a sort of anchor; here and there lumps of sod were used to weight down the sticks. As yet very little work had been done, but it would be interesting to see how much would be accomplished during the next two or three weeks.

On returning to the canoe which had been left on the shore of Third Lake the boys heard a curious, crunching sound. They crept cautiously forward, and soon saw a large porcupine enjoying a dinner of *paddle*. The strange animal was gnawing away at a great rate and did not hear their approach. Now it happened to be Charlie's favourite paddle and he did not propose to have it eaten; so, much as he would have enjoyed watching the animal's behaviour, he decided to interfere. The porcupine's surprise at seeing the two humans was most amusing. He looked up at them for a moment with a queer expression as though asking why they wanted to interrupt him during his meal-time and then, leaving the paddle, he quietly started to walk away,

without the least appearance of hurry. Charlie ran round and foolishly managed to stop directly in front of him, not more than a foot or so away. Quick as a wink the apparently slow animal swung round and struck Charlie's foot a hard blow with his heavy well armed tail. Though Charlie jumped back, he was not quick enough to avoid receiving a full dose of quills, some of which went through the leather and penetrated his foot. For a moment the fretful porcupine stood still and looked like a well filled pincushion. All over his back the quills were pointing in every direction, especially forward. The porcupine believes thoroughly in turning his back to the enemy and no matter how Jack tried to get in front, the animal was always too quick, and round came the powerful tail ready to strike anything within reach. Charlie, who in the meantime was sitting on a log and nearly helpless, called out:

"Oh, leave the little brute alone and come here and pull out these beastly quills. They have pinned the moccasins to my feet and I can't take a step."

Jack promptly came to his aid while the porky, equally promptly, took advantage of the situation and made off to a more restful clime, leaving his vanquished enemy to struggle with the painful and most unpleasant task of extracting several dozen

sharp pointed barbed quills. Charlie's opinion of porcupines in general and this one in particular became more and more unprintable, as each offending quill was cut out. After more than an hour of hard work his foot was freed from all unnecessary projections, and he was once more able to walk, though not with any noticeable degree of pleasure. The first thing he did was to pick up the mutilated paddle. Fortunately they had arrived in time to save it from complete destruction, as the animal had little more than commenced his eccentric meal, and had only nibbled round the narrow part near the end of the handle.

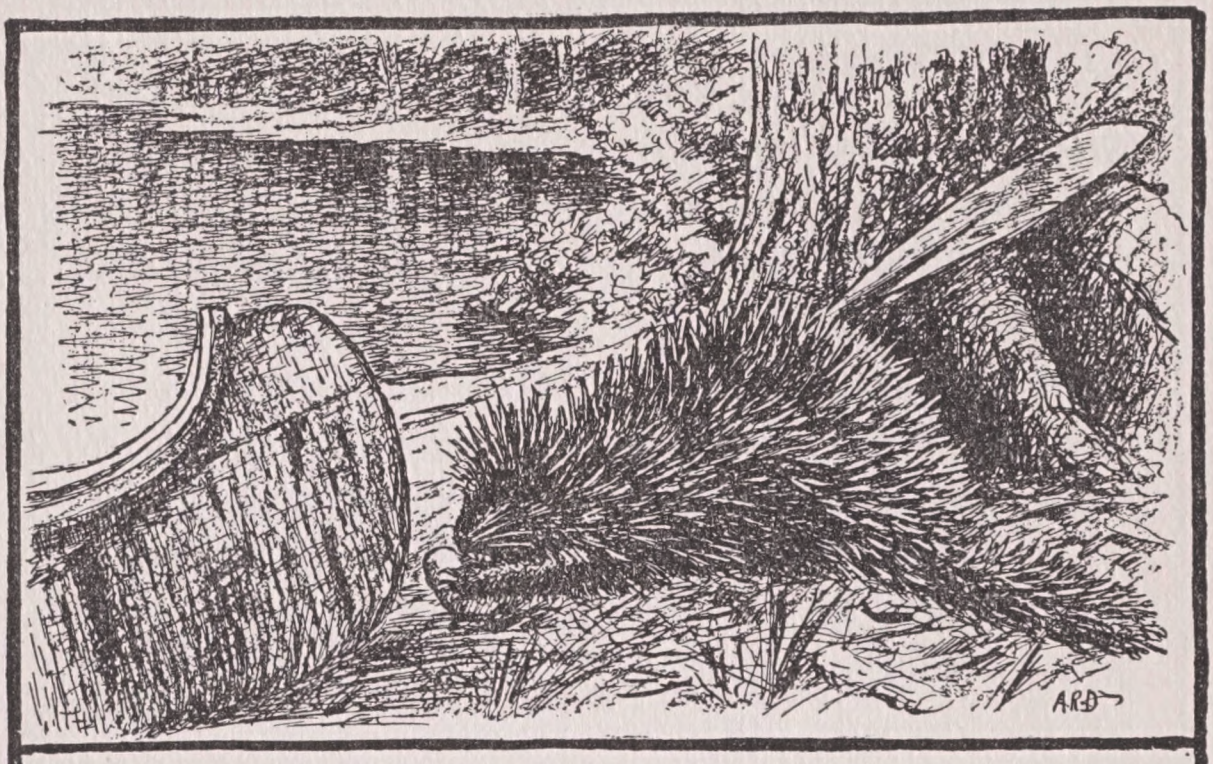
Any wood, cloth, or leather that has been much in contact with the human hand is much sought after by the porcupine. Apparently there is a certain amount of salt and grease in the material which suits their peculiar taste. Therefore in the country where they live it is never safe to leave anything of the sort within their reach. Salt in almost any form tempts them to take most absured risks, but of all foods, bacon or pork makes perhaps the strongest appeal to their palate, and they will even climb out on the thinnest branches to secure it. In build they are to all appearances very clumsy and it is astonishing that they are able to climb almost any tree with ease and remarkable speed. Frequently they pay nocturnal

visits to farms where they and the dogs have lively encounters. The wise dog leaves them religiously alone; those who have not learned their lesson from sad experience will rush at the unwelcome visitor; the result is usually highly disastrous to the foolish dog, who is forced to retire with his nose and paws filled with quills. The common idea that the porcupine *shoots* his quills is quite incorrect. The quills are lightly attached to the animal, and are very sharply pointed and slightly barbed at the outer ends. They enter any reasonably soft substance with the least pressure. As a rule, in an encounter the porcupine's quills come from the tail, which is the animal's chief weapon. The tail is about a foot in length, very thick and strong, and covered with coarse hair and quills. The flesh of the American porcupine is fairly palatable and, as the animal is one of the few that can be killed by man armed with nothing more complicated than a stick, it has frequently supplied a meal to those who have been lost in the Northern woods.

It was some days before Charlie recovered from his meeting with porky; his foot had been so badly inflamed that he could not endure the pressure of even the softest moccasins, and for a time he was afraid he would be unable to go down to meet the Sylvesters. However, thanks to his fine healthy constitution, the healing process continued rapidly.

Two days before it was time to start down river he had recovered entirely, and it was a question whether he or Jack was the more excited when the morning arrived for them to leave camp. They were up with the first gleam of dawn and well on their way down the river by the time the sun, round and red, crept up over the tree tops. All day they travelled, never content to let the current carry them along, but paddling the bark canoe over the dancing crests without resting except for lunch. It was a race against the sun, and they won the race, arriving at the steamer landing as the sky was putting on its evening clothes of pink and yellow.

To the excited pair the morning seemed very slow in coming. They awoke at dawn and were soon ready for the steamer's arrival though there was little chance of her coming till after ten o'clock. As a matter of fact it was nearly eleven before smoke was seen down the lake. Gradually the vessel herself came into sight and she seemed most aggravatingly slow to the boys who stood waiting on the end of the little wooden pier. Another half hour passed and then figures could be distinguished. Soon hands were seen to wave. This ended the suspense, for there was now no doubt that the family was on board. It was a happy meeting that took place on the steamer some minutes later. Probably no one was happier than



The porcupine indulges in a meal of paddle; a curious item of food. Only the handle is eaten because of the salty taste which comes from contact with the human hand.

Mrs. Sylvester when she saw her son so bronzed and well! Quite a different being from the pale boy who had left her only a few weeks before. Mr. Sylvester looked at the sunburnt pair and turning to his wife said:

"Well, Mary, old Saunders's medicine seems to have worked wonders; did you ever see such a change in your life? Not much the matter with them, eh?"

"We are both able to sit up and take a small bit of nourishment, if properly urged," Jack replied and added, "but we ought to be getting ashore. Come along, Evelyn."

Charlie pointing out the camp to Evelyn. Big-ears, Fluff, and the red squirrel greeted the newcomer in various ways

Having said good-bye to the captain and thanked him for all his kindness, they stepped out to the pier where their belongings were piled up. It did not take long to load up the canoes; Jack went with his father and mother, while Evelyn, to her great delight, went in the birch bark with Charlie. It was a jolly party that paddled away that bright September day.

The journey up river took two and a half days and they reached MacPherson's trail late in the afternoon. Each one shouldered a load of such things as would be most necessary for immediate use. The rest of the outfit was left to be carried over the following morning. As soon as they arrived at Four Island Lake, Charlie took Evelyn

in the canoe and started for the camp a minute ahead of the others. He wanted her to be the first to land. As they stepped ashore, Big-ears came hopping down to welcome them, much to Evelyn's delight. She had heard of the little hare and was glad to see him. The various other camp pets were somewhat suspicious. The jays flew about and made many remarks about the new arrival but would not come very near, while the red squirrel stuck his head round the tree trunk and scolded to his heart's content. Charlie pointed out the different arrangements of the camp but would not take Evelyn up till the others joined them. It was with pride that the boys showed their well-planned camp, and, as Mr. Sylvester said, it would have been difficult to improve on it in any respect. Evelyn was particularly pleased with the bark shack that had been built especially for her.

Charlie suggested that he would start getting the evening meal ready while the others should try and catch some trout. Mrs. Sylvester stayed to help him and get her own and Evelyn's things unpacked. A fine fire was soon burning brightly and a pan of soda biscuits baking in the reflecting oven. Before these had reached their full golden brown colour the fishermen returned bringing sixteen nice trout all ready for cooking.

Evelyn was so happy to be once more in the woods with the smell of burning logs and the sweet scent of the balsam that she sat quietly enjoying it all and scarcely saying a word.

"What's the matter, Evie, old girl?" Charlie asked, seeing how quiet she was.

"Matter with me? Nothing on earth. I'm just too altogether happy to talk. For weeks I've been thinking of you both, night and day, and envying you every minute, and marking off the days in my diary, and now here I am. I can scarcely believe it's true, it's all so absolutely—oh, bother—there *is* no word to express how I feel. I simply love it all and wish I were going to stay here forever, don't you, dear little Big-ears?" she asked as the hare put his paws on her dress and begged for a bit of biscuit. "And you, Fluff, wouldn't you like us to stay on here for ever and ever?" The jay looked at her, turning his head sideways, but he stayed on Jack's arm. The other jays had gone to roost for the night but Fluff was becoming contaminated by contact with human beings and frequently went to bed disgracefully late.

While sitting round the blazing camp fire, Charlie and Jack gave an account of all that had happened to them during the weeks that had passed, including the story of Sneaky Bill and Pete. The

Sylvesters had already heard something about this from MacPherson and the captain of the steamer. Mrs. Sylvester was rather worried at the thought that such a character as Sneaky Bill should be wandering about the country. But, as her husband explained, there was slight danger of his paying another visit to the camp now that he knew the police were after him, and she was finally convinced that the chance of trouble was quite remote. There was much to talk about. It was very late when, at Evelyn's suggestion, they all turned in, with the understanding that a visit to some of the beaver colonies should be made next day if the weather proved favourable.

Charlie and Jack were up betimes in the morning; they planned to go out and get some nice fresh trout for breakfast and not awaken the family until their return. Evelyn was a very light sleeper and she heard them moving about; so, quickly dressing herself, she rushed down just as the two were about to launch one of the canoes.

"You're a fine pair of schemers, aren't you? You thought you could skip off and leave me behind! Next time don't make quite so much noise and you may succeed," she remarked, and added as she saw they had their rods, "if you are going fishing, you will kindly wait till I get my rod."

"All right, old girl," Charlie said laughing. "We

thought you would bite our heads off, if we waked you up so early. However, we are really delighted to have you with us. Only remember you must not catch the biggest fish as you did last night; you'll get altogether too stuck up."

She scarcely heard the remark as she was already half way to where her light trout rod hung. It did not take long to catch enough fish for breakfast as the trout were rising well. The fire had been started before they had gone out fishing and when they returned was in good condition, with a hot bed of glowing embers. Jack called his father and mother; breakfast was prepared and ready by the time everyone had finished their morning toilet.

As the weather was fine it was decided that they should first go down to the river and bring up the rest of the outfit and then go off for the day and pay visits to the various beaver places.

It did not take long to get the outfit and then, after preparing a light lunch, they started out for the day. On their way to the canal, which was the show piece of the district, several moose were seen much to Evelyn's excitement, for she had never been at all near one before. She was greatly interested in Charlie's account of his famous ride and amused at the ignominious ending. Before reaching the canal Mr. Sylvester noticed a peculiar

Stump of a tree cut down by beaver. The tree cuttings show that snow had fallen while the animals were at work

high stump round which were several cuttings. It was evidently beaver work as the teeth marks were quite clear. After some discussion they came to the conclusion that a heavy fall of snow had interrupted the animals after they had begun their task; probably the next attempt was made standing on the snow, when, again snow had fallen and covered up their work; so a third and final attempt was made and the tree cut down.

During the day several ponds were examined and in one of them three beaver were seen, but only for a moment, as the approach had been made down wind and the scent was carried to the animals. A visit was paid to the dam which the boys had

The bull moose straddled a maple sapling and rode it down so that he could reach the tender twigs

discovered in its early stages of construction, and it was found to have been enlarged considerably though it was not yet water-tight. Evelyn and her parents were fascinated by all the wonderful evidence of beaver work and the extraordinary skill displayed, but of course the work was almost entirely old. Scarcely any indications of recent activity were found. Not until the leaves began to turn would the autumn work commence and then as the nights became colder the remarkable preparations for winter would begin in earnest. As the Sylvesters expected to stay for nearly five weeks they hoped to have ample opportunity of seeing plenty of interesting examples of what the beaver do.

It was decided that for the next two weeks or so they could amuse themselves with the fishing. This was combining business with pleasure as the party of five required a lot of fish for food. Several trips were made to the main river for bass, which gave excellent sport. Between fishing and short expeditions in various directions the days passed only too rapidly, but always they were full of interest. Deer and moose were so abundant that a day seldom went by without some being seen, and Evelyn in particular was never tired of watching the great ungainly moose. They seemed to fascinate her by their very ugliness.

Of course the bulls were beginning to pay more attention to their personal appearance as the mating season was drawing near. Their great antlers were fully grown and the velvet, which had protected them while the bone was making, was now being discarded. Frequently they were seen in the woods brushing their horns against the branches of trees. Once when Evelyn was out in the woods with the boys they came upon a well grown bull. For a long time they watched him as he walked slowly along picking off the leaves of different trees. After a time he came to a young maple sapling which had a fine bunch of inviting leaves, but well out of the animal's reach; the bull took one look at them and then deliberately straddled the

trunk and rode it down without the least effort thanks to his great weight.

On another occasion the boys had a splendid joke on poor Evelyn. It was early one fine morning and they had gone out to a small pond where moose were in the habit of feeding. All three were hiding in a patch of thick undergrowth when there was a crashing sound in the woods and suddenly a strange roar that seemed to come from almost anywhere was heard. Evelyn who had been watching and listening very intently started violently at the sound and exclaimed in an excited voice:

"What's that, is it the moose coming for us?"

This was too much for the boys. They threw discretion to the winds and indulged in a hearty laugh, much to Evelyn's indignation.

"Come on," said Charlie, as soon as he regained his self-control, "and we will find your roaring moose."

He and Jack got up and walked toward the edge of the pond. Evelyn followed a little shamefacedly, as she had begun to have a suspicion as to what had made the sudden roar. The boys peered about for a few minutes then, Charlie called out:

"Here's your bull moose! Come carefully, or he may charge you."

Evelyn approached and saw an immense bull frog

sitting on a flat stone surrounded by the floating water lily leaves. The frog looked so comical that Evelyn could not resist joining in the boys' laugh.

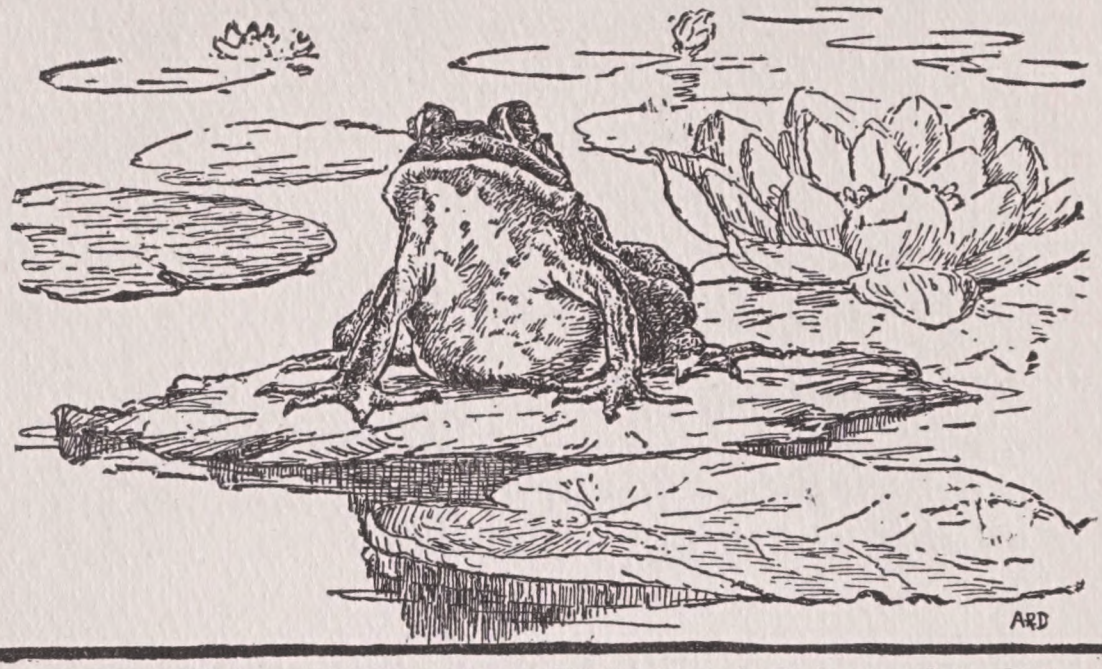
"I don't care! It *was* a bull, even if it was only a bull frog instead of a bull moose. But, joking aside, did you ever hear a bull frog make such a terrific noise?"

"Oh, rather, these giants up in this country have wonderfully developed vocal organs. Several times when we have been watching in the quiet evenings they have made us start, but you were funny, old girl. I wish you could have seen your expression," and Charlie laughed as he thought of it.

CHAPTER XI

The summer ends and the beaver begin to think of work. An account of beaver and their domestic arrangements. The animals are seen at work. Evelyn and the camp pets. An interesting evening.

SEPTEMBER was drawing to a close. Here and there in the woods and swamps stray maples, like tongues of fire, stood out brilliantly in the landscape. The birches were sprinkled with the purest gold and the beaver knew by these signs that their days of indolence were passed and much work lay before them if they would prepare for the long, bitter winter. Dams must be built up and tightened and strengthened to enlarge the ponds; lodges be made roomy enough to hold the growing families, and they must be put in repair ready for the plastering of mud; bedding would be needed for their personal comfort during the long period of imprisonment when there would be little to do but sleep. And, hardest work of all, trees in dozens must be felled, cut up and taken to the store house near the lodges.



The huge bull frog whose strange calls frightened Evelyn and made her believe that a moose was coming for her

For all this work only six or eight weeks were allowed. One might wonder why it was put off till so late; why could not the trees be cut during the long summer days? The answer is somewhat hard to give with accuracy. In trying to look for a reason one first notes that the beaver does not work by daylight except on rare occasions. He prefers the privacy of darkness, or at best the light of the moon and stars. In the Northern country the nights are short during the summer months, too short, indeed, for the accomplishment of much work.

But perhaps this is not the chief cause for delaying the work. We find that for some reason

Beaver cutting grass for bedding. Both grass and long torn strips of soft wood, such as cedar are used

best known to themselves the beaver do not cut down trees for storage while the sap is running. It is safe to presume that there is a purpose in this; probably the bark which forms the animals' food does not keep in good condition under water unless it is properly matured. Around a beaver pond trees may be found frequently with several cuts made through the bark and into the actual wood. According to many woodsmen this is the work of the master beaver who blazes these trees which he thinks should be cut, so that the younger and less experienced members of the colony will fell only those that are suitable. This is of course a very pretty fairy story, but it has probably not the

slightest bit of truth in it. From careful observation I am convinced that the cut is made in order to ascertain whether the sap has stopped running. In some instances a tree will be "girdled," that is to say, the bark is cut completely round the trunk. This prevents the flow of the sap and kills the tree. (The sap is the life of a tree and corresponds more or less to the blood in an animal.) This is evidently done to hasten the drying, and the tree, after being left for a week or two, will be cut down. We can see, therefore, that there are some reasons for delaying the wood cutting until autumn, though perhaps these are not the correct explanations.

Why the dams are not more often built during the summer is difficult to say. Perhaps the reason is to be found in the domestic arrangements of the beaver family which briefly are as follows: Mr. and Mrs. Beaver have a house which they share with their young (four and five in number) that were born in the spring. During the first months of the lives of these young ones they are not strong enough to do much work and, as autumn draws to a close and winter comes, they stay with their parents. Early in the spring Mrs. Beaver prepares for a new family and as a rule sends her mate off to take care of himself; he is probably very much in the way as the lodge is decidedly restricted in its accommodation. The young arrive in April or

thereabouts, funny little imitations of their parents, even to their teeth, which are well formed, though small, at birth. It is not long before they are taken out in the lake, where of course they swim instinctively. The fanciful story tellers' accounts of how they are taught by their parents to swim are too ridiculous to merit serious consideration. Anything that is instinctive does not have to be taught, otherwise it would no longer be instinct; feeding, walking, swimming, climbing, hiding, playing, come to all creatures according to their requirements, just as naturally as breathing and sleeping; so the little beaver go out of their home and make their bow to the great world which at this time is waking up after the long winter sleep and is so thoroughly alive and wonderful in its fresh green clothing. For many weeks they come out to play and grow strong. During this period the lodge is not their exclusive home. Holes in banks are used more frequently, so that the lodge may be cleaned and aired. The family of the previous year are now fully grown and though they usually stay in the vicinity of their home, they are preparing to move away and seek their fortunes elsewhere. It is late in the summer before they go in search of mates and places for their new homes. As they travel usually along water courses, they examine the country very carefully for traces of others of

Birch tree cut into by beaver to find whether it is in fit condition for felling

their kind and leave and receive little messages in a curious manner. Small mud piles are made on convenient points of land. Each beaver, when he finds one of these, adds a handful or two of mud which is believed to be scented with his or her particular brand of castoreum. (The castoreum is a curious musk smelling substance secreted in certain glands. It has been used medicinally by human beings ever since very early ages and is mentioned by both Hippocrates and Pliny.) This imparts certain information which is probably of direct interest to the little animals. If fortune favours our wanderer he finds a mate and forthwith a new colony is started.

The latest edition of the Beaver News. Adding a little mud to the pile, which is the beaver's method of giving information to his friends

As by this time it is early autumn, it is easy to see why the dam and lodge were not built earlier. But we must go back to Mr. and Mrs. Beaver. He, like a dutiful husband has returned (they mate for life and should one of the pair die, it is believed that the survivor remains solitary for the rest of his or her life), and the summer months are devoted to taking care of the young family. These are not old enough to be of any help in building operations until autumn; this may be another reason for postponing serious work until that time.

One evening Charlie and Jack went off to have a look at some of the beaver ponds to find out whether serious building operations had commenced. The

first pond they visited was the new one they had discovered some weeks earlier. To their delight they found the dam was nearly completed, and was fully seventy-five feet long and about four feet high; it was solidly built of sticks and mud through which no water escaped. The pond resulting from the construction of this dam covered two or three acres; on an island was a lodge more than half finished. No sign of the beaver themselves was seen, so the boys went on to another pond farther up the stream. They approached very cautiously in hopes of seeing the animals at work. When within a few yards of the edge of the water they took cover behind a clump of alders and willows, and lay there for some time before anything happened. The evening was so calm that the pond was like a mirror in which was reflected each tree and stump of the opposite shore with marvellous clearness. Suddenly the smoothness of the water was disturbed by a beaver swimming and carrying in his mouth a branch for his evening meal; with this he landed quite close to the two silent watchers and, sitting comfortably on his broad flat tail, proceeded to enjoy his supper of bark. When the branch was entirely peeled, it was dropped into the water and the beaver swam away, disappearing into the water without making a ripple.

As nothing further occurred during the next half

hour, Charlie proposed going to the dam to examine it. Creeping noiselessly along, the two boys approached the long bow-shaped dam, but just before they reached it, a dark object was seen moving slowly through the water, twenty or thirty yards from the shore. Then the object seemed to grow suspicious and remained motionless for many minutes. During this time a slight current of air drifted from the boys across the quiet water. Suddenly the beaver, warned by the scent thus carried, discovered their presence, and without a moment's hesitation gave the water a resounding smack with his tail so as to warn any other beaver in the vicinity that the enemy was about, and disappeared.

This curious method of signalling is peculiar to the beaver and is most effective; the sound, which is as loud as a pistol shot, is carried by the water an extraordinary distance; every beaver that hears it immediately seeks cover and as a rule will not reappear for a long time. This, it may be added, is the chief function of the beaver's large heavy tail; beyond its signalling value it is chiefly used as a balance to assist the animal in standing erect, as it does when cutting branches and carrying them, or when engaged in building operations. It is *not* used as a trowel notwithstanding what *popular* writers may say, nor for carrying mud.

As the boys knew full well that there was no use in

The smoothness of the water was disturbed by a beaver swimming and carrying a branch for his evening meal

remaining once the alarm had been sounded they left the pond after inspecting the dam and returned to camp thoroughly pleased with the result of their investigations. When Evelyn heard that the beaver were really getting busy she suggested that they all go the following afternoon and be prepared to stay till dark on the chance of seeing the animals at work. It would be a good time to go as the evening would not be too dark owing to the moon being nearly full.

The morning broke dull and foreboding; before nine o'clock rain began to fall in that steady determined way which offers no hope even to the most optimistic; so the day was spent in camp,

Suddenly the beaver discovered their presence and gave the water a resounding smack with his tail

except for a short time when some fishing was done purely for larder purposes. The various pets helped to amuse and interest the family. Evelyn continued her attempts to conquer "Fliptail," as she called the red squirrel, because he never kept his tail still. Curiously enough the red squirrel differs from his gray cousin in that he is very hard to tame, but Evelyn's constant efforts produced some results, and, though always suspicious, Fliptail would condescend to sit on her arm and once or twice even allowed her to stroke his back. No one else was permitted to indulge in such familiarities. One of the jays also became devoted to her, while Big-ears divided his affections between Evelyn and Charlie.

The long day dragged, as wet days do in camp. At night, when they all turned in, the rain was still pattering steadily on the tents as though prepared to go on indefinitely. Shortly after midnight, however, the sky cleared and the large moon shone brightly on the land and promised that the coming day should be fine. The promise was kept; a more wonderful morning could not have been, and the family woke to see the dampened woods sparkling with white frost. There is something about the Northern woods on a bright frosty autumn morning that cannot be described. It is intoxicating, and makes one glad to be alive and out in the wilds, far away from dreary, smoky, crowded cities where rest is not known. So thought each member of the Sylvester family as they sat round the primitive table on the home-made chairs and ate the delicious well-browned trout. All agreed that a special vote of thanks was owed to the God of the woods who allowed them to enjoy the simple yet withal complex beauties of his great domain.

An all-day trip was arranged with the idea of not returning till quite late, so provisions were taken for two meals, and off they went to make the most of the glorious weather. By unanimous consent Long Lake was chosen as their objective. The day was spent in looking at beaver works and doing some fishing until the middle of the afternoon when

the party returned to one of the nearer ponds where they intended to spend the evening. Supper was prepared and eaten before they took up their positions. The sun was nearing the horizon by the time they had ensconced themselves comfortably a little distance from a large dam. To make sure that the beaver would do some work Jack made an opening about three feet wide in the dam so that the water might escape and warn the animals that something was wrong. As the sun sank below the trees in the west the full moon rose in the east, and cast its gentle light on the woods and water.

The watchers did not have long to wait before things began to happen. First of all a deer, followed by a well grown fawn, came out of the woods on the opposite shore. These two had their evening drink of cool water and then, using the dam as a bridge, crossed over to where the Sylvesters were hiding. The beautiful pair were entirely unsuspicious until they came to within four or five yards of the human beings. Then the tainted air struck their sensitive nostrils and with a cry of fear they bounded away with long, easy jumps.

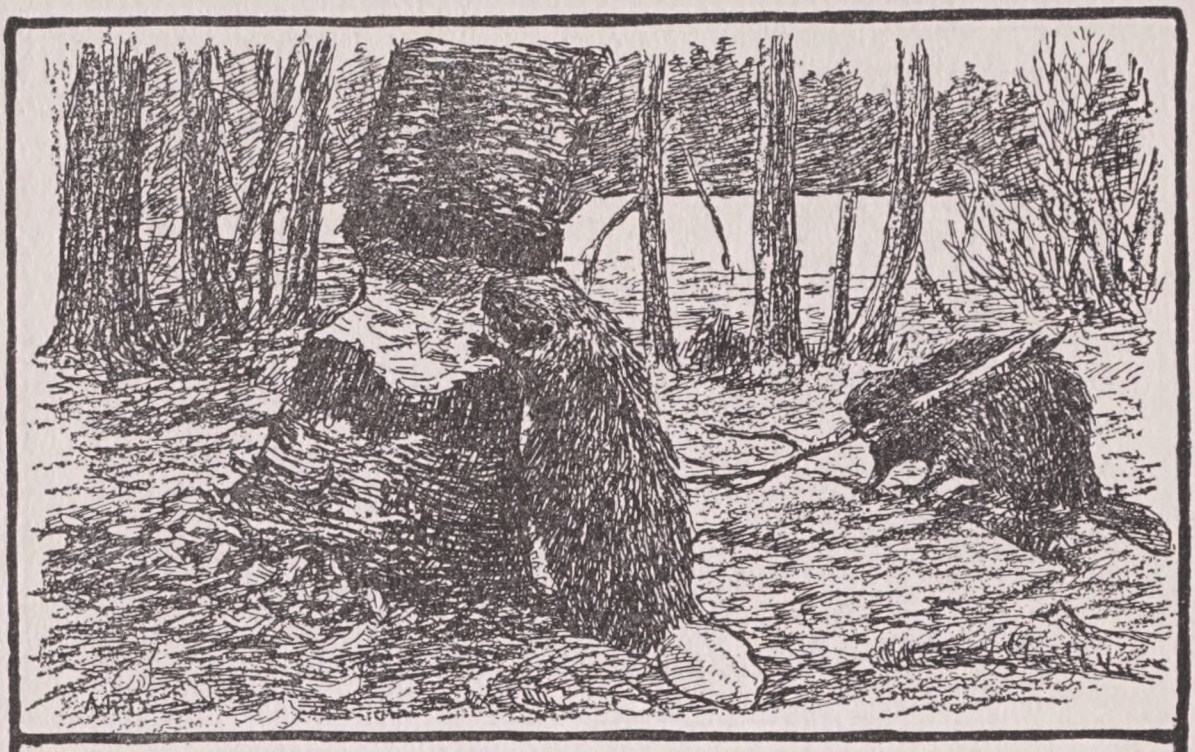
Next came an owl that sat on a spruce tree directly over Evelyn's head. It was a much puzzled owl, evidently a complete stranger to human beings. For a long time he stared down,

moving his large head backward and forward as he looked first at one and then another of the party. No one moved, so the owl dropped lightly to a lower branch not more than ten feet from the ground. At that moment Evelyn was overcome with a violent desire to sneeze, which would not be suppressed but burst forth in full force. This was too much for the poor owl. He did not wait to argue with creatures that made such strange noises, but flew off silently like a gigantic moth.

In the lake many muskrats could be seen swimming about, like dark spots at the point of each quivering V-shaped trail that rippled on the surface of the placid water. Then at last came a larger dark object and it moved so slowly that it scarcely disturbed the calm water. Sometimes it stopped absolutely still as though listening; the stillness of the evening was unbroken and the air was free from taint; so the beaver came to the dam and he saw that the water was escaping. A piece of drift wood was soon found and brought to where the water was rushing out. After some manipulating, this wood was placed securely in the breach. Then the little engineer came ashore and cut down a large alder and added this to the drift wood. Of course these could not check the flow of water so he dived under the stream and after about a minute reappeared carrying a large sod which with ex-

traordinary speed he forced in between the woodwork; but a lot more was required; so the industrious creature dove again and, again coming up each time with a sod.

While this was going on, another beaver came on the scene. Seeing that the repair work was progressing well and apparently not being very fond of dam building, this late comer landed and made his way directly to a small birch tree that was not more than ten yards from the clump of bushes which concealed the interested observers. He walked round the tree several times as though sizing up the situation and then without more ado, began cutting through the silvery bark. Crunch, crunch, crunch, went the sharp teeth. The sound was strangely loud in the stillness of the night. The tree was not more than six inches in diameter and the beaver's teeth were in good condition. So within half an hour a creaking was heard, followed immediately by a swishing sound, as the little birch came crashing to earth. During this time the other beaver had been busy making the dam secure, and had paid no attention to the tree cutting. A certain writer has described how the beaver act when felling trees. This writer declares that, while one beaver does the cutting, another stays in the water and watches the tree; as soon as he sees it begin to sway, he warns his



The wood cutters. Beaver engaged in cutting down a birch tree in order to secure the branches for the winter's supply of food

companion. Both retire to the safety of the lake as soon as the tree falls, and remain there for a long time, in fear lest the sound may have attracted their enemies. This is another of the many fables connected with beaver and their work. To begin with how can a beaver distinguish from the water the tree that is being cut among the other trees whose branches all intermingle and form a great dark mass in the night? and then, why should one have to give a warning when the other who is doing the cutting can feel and hear the first creak of the tree when it is about to fall? As to any reason for remaining quiet for fear that the sound of the crash might attract enemies, it is a foolish

The beaver bites off the branches within reach before cutting down the tree

idea because the noise of cutting the wood can be heard distinctly for a long distance.

No sooner had our beaver brought down the birch than he cut off a branch and carried it to the water and swam away in the direction of the lodge. A little later he reappeared, but on landing did not go directly to the tree. Instead he went round the bushes which concealed the interested watchers and came to within a few feet of Jack before getting a whiff of the much dreaded human scent. For a moment the surprised animal stood up as though to make sure and then with remarkable speed rushed straight to the lake and on entering gave a terrific slap with his heavy tail and

vanished. At this time the second beaver was standing on the dam putting some finishing touches to his repair work. Immediately on hearing the warning signal he lost all interest in the dam and slipped quickly into the water and dived. The boys then stood up and suggested that they had better return to camp as the evening performance was finished. It had been an extraordinary, interesting experience for them all, and luck had been good to them beyond their wildest expectation.

CHAPTER XII

Autumn. The beaver work hard and accomplish much. Notes of interest. The Sylvesters leave and take Big-ears with them. The boys feel lonely. They meet a large bull moose. They also meet some old friends.

AUTUMN had come to the Canadian woods; the recent frosts had hurried the colouring of the leaves and all save the evergreens were clothed in their glorious tints of gold, orange, and scarlet in brilliant contrast to their sombre neighbours the spruces and pines. The whole country was like fairyland and the crisp, fresh air of the fall was good to breathe. Evelyn gazed on the landscape and felt rebellious. It did not seem right to leave such beauty and return to the land of brick and mortar. Yet in four days more she would be going down the river and her holiday—and such a holiday—would be a thing of the past, just a wonderful memory of the weeks of happiness unmarred by a single cloud. Charlie and she were drifting along in the canoe. Neither of them spoke much, yet each was thinking of the same thing.

"Never mind, Eves, old girl, we have had a jolly time and we must simply look forward to coming up somewhere in this country again," he said, trying to cheer her up a bit.

"That's all right, but I like the present so much better than the future. You can never tell what may happen. While here we are and it seems a beastly shame to leave it all. However, I suppose there's no use complaining, but I wish that Thursday was four weeks away instead of four miserable short days. *Oh! how* I hate going." Big-ears, who was in the canoe, seemed to realize that something was wrong and came up to Evelyn and looked up into her face while he flopped his large ears backward and forward. "What do you think about it, bunny?" Evelyn said, taking the hare in her lap. "And who's going to look after you when we are all gone? Some horrid old lynx will catch you, I suppose. Look here, Charlie, why can't I take him with me when I go? We could easily fix up a place for him near the house."

Charlie, who had often wondered whether this was not feasible, replied after a moment's hesitation: "I suppose it could be done, but it will be quite a job getting him home. You would have to get a basket or something to carry him in. We'll ask your mother and father what they think of it." Eventually it was arranged that Big-ears should

be saved from some hungry lynx or fox and be taken home by Evelyn to live a life of comfort, entirely free from trouble and anxiety.

Two days before the time set for leaving Four Island Camp a long trip was made among the different beaver colonies, chiefly for the purpose of seeing the wood-cutting that had been done. The time was now getting short and evidence of activity was found about every one of the occupied ponds. Another month and severe frosts and snow might be expected and then it would be too late.

Around some of the larger colonies the number of trees that had been cut was truly astonishing, and in nearly every case roadways leading from the trees to the pond had been carefully cleared of obstacles in order to facilitate the carrying of material. Some of these roads were seven or eight feet wide and as much as several hundred feet long. Where the trees had been cut near lakes or streams, it was observed that nearly all had fallen toward the water. This gave rise to the question of whether the animals did this deliberately, but a careful examination of the trees still standing showed that most of them either leaned toward the water, or at least had their greater development of branches on the water or brighter side, so that it was evident the trees, when cut, would naturally fall in that direction. Branches grow larger and heavier

toward the greatest amount of light and there is no doubt that this has given rise to the popular belief that the beaver *knows* which way the tree will fall. As a matter of fact he does not; he simply cuts the tree and it falls as it will. Many mistakes are made by the little lumbermen, and trees very frequently become lodged in the branches of their neighbours. In these cases the beaver, reluctant to lose the results of his work, will make repeated efforts to bring the tree down by cutting through the trunk a foot or two above where it rests against the ground.

Some interesting examples were found of where the beaver had displayed extraordinary intelligence in shortening the distance between the fallen tree and the store house, which is always in the water adjoining the lodge; short canals were cut through points of land, or through islands, and in one instance, where water transport would have necessitated a hard swim against fairly swift current, a short canal and roadway was made by which the beaver were able to avoid the current and come into the river in a back eddy; where the current was a help instead of an obstacle. To accomplish this a high degree of reasoning power was required on the part of the four-footed engineer.

The more we study the beaver the more we are amazed at their remarkable intelligence and fore-

thought. They plan ahead for almost every emergency. The mere storing of food for winter is done by many birds and animals, but the manner in which the beaver does it is one of the greatest achievements, or rather combination of achievements, to be found in the animal world. Almost every contingency is guarded against, except the deadly steel trap. That weapon handled with the ingenuity of man is too much for the wretched creatures. They fall easy victims, as we can see by considering the appalling number of skins that were marketed in the years before reasonable laws were made to safeguard the animals and these laws were made not a day too soon as the beaver was threatened with complete extermination. Had this happened the most interesting feature of animal life that exists would have vanished for ever, to the great and irreparable loss to all of us who enjoy a few weeks or months in the Northern woods.

To give some idea of the terrible toll taken when the trade in beaver pelts was most flourishing about the middle of last century, it may be sufficient to state that the annual number of skins sold in England alone would frequently exceed the *hundred thousand* mark and in some years nearly doubled that number. At that time the fur was used in the making of hats; fortunately substitutes have since

been found in the different species of rabbits, hares, etc.

In the early history of Canada the beaver played a most important part. The skin was the unit of exchange; whether it was a blanket, or an axe that was needed it cost so many "beaver." Even churches were built from contributions of the skins. In fact it entered into everything connected with the life and requirements, even the politics of the people of Canada and the more northern United States and was largely instrumental in opening up the country by exploration. This is no place to go into the subject as I have already collected all that I could find in the way of the most interesting facts connected with the history of the beaver and its relation to man and published it in a previous book.* To any one really interested in the beaver I can strongly recommend that extraordinary work, "The Jesuit Relations in Canada," the English translation of which will be found in the larger libraries. These priests were careful observers and they had to send in a full account of everything in the countries to which they were sent. So we find in these "Relations" (meaning accounts or narrations) that not only do they deal with the Indians and their customs and with the agricultural and general conditions, but with surprising accur-

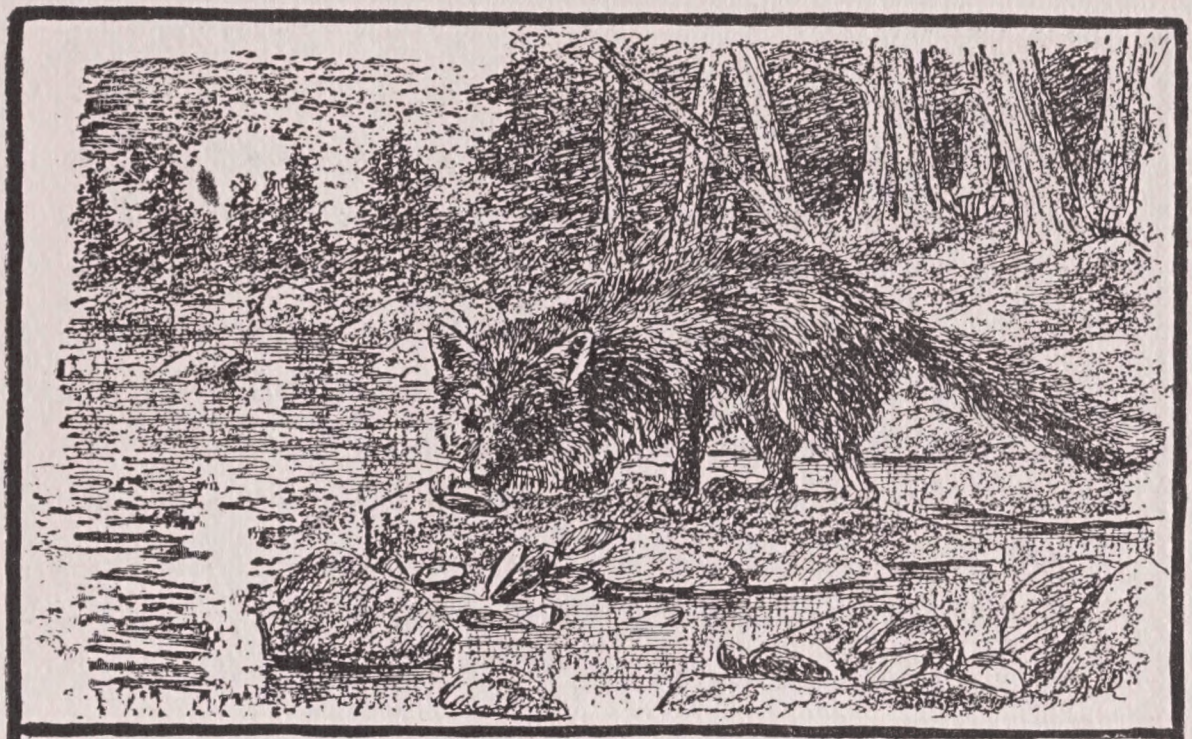
* "The Romance of the Beaver," published in 1914.

acy do they go into the natural history, devoting a great amount of space to the beaver, and give many facts connected with them that have never been recorded by any other writers. In the course of my own investigations, I found an instance of where some beaver were building a dam (in Newfoundland). The structure was almost completed, but had not yet got its strength from subsidence, when a great rain came and flooded the country. The volume of water that rushed down the stream across which the dam had been built threatened to destroy the beaver's work, so in order to protect the dam they cut it open and let the water escape. As soon as things became normal, the breach was closed and the structure completed. Some years later while reading the "Relations" I found that as far back as 1610 one of the "Black gowns," as the priests were called by the Indians, gave an account of a similar occurrence in the following words: "But if the river swell more than is safe, they (the beaver) break open some part of the structure, and let through as much water as seems sufficient." I thought *I* had made an entirely original observation and was amused to discover that the priest had beaten me by some three hundred years, and so far as I know he was the only one who had made note of this extremely convincing example of beaver intelligence.

Before serious tree felling begins the beaver clear a roadway to the scene of their operations

The Sylvesters spent one of the most interesting days they had enjoyed during their holiday looking at all the different branches of beaver work and returned to camp late that evening, more convinced than ever that the study of the beaver was the most absorbing of all natural history subjects.

The following day was devoted to packing and getting ready for the journey home, and early next morning the party, including Big-ears, left Four Island Camp with the deepest regret. A more perfect holiday could not have been asked for. Everything had gone well from start to finish. Poor Evelyn found it very hard to leave the boys and begged in vain to be allowed to stay with them



Early in the morning the fox prowls along the shores of lakes and rivers and enjoys a meal of clams

for the remainder of their time. But neither her father nor mother considered it advisable.

A day and a half was allowed for the run down river and they reached the steamer's pier only half an hour before the boat arrived. "Good-bye, good luck to you both! Take care of yourselves and remember we shall expect to see you home in six weeks," were the last words Mrs. Sylvester called out as the snorting steamer headed down the lake. The boys remained on the pier and watched till only a tiny curl of black smoke showed the position of the boat.

It seemed very lonely going back to camp by themselves and they spoke but little as they made

their way against the current. Somehow they felt no inclination to hurry, and almost dreaded seeing the camp as it was bound to appear so very deserted. Fortunately the exuberance of healthful youth does not allow unhappiness or worry to last long and by next morning, under the influence of the sparkling autumn sunshine and the beauty of the country they had resumed their customary light-hearted cheerfulness, and were ready to enjoy the paddling up stream. The country had changed greatly since the first time they had made the trip. Then all was green, and animal life abundant. Moose and deer were to be seen in most of the ponds and swamps. Now the river banks were a gorgeous mass of marvellously brilliant colours, but the moose and deer no longer showed themselves. They had grown very shy, and had retired to the seclusion of the thick woods. A fox was seen early one morning on the edge of the water enjoying a breakfast of clams. Muskrats were the only animals that appeared in any number. Migrating birds were seen in abundance. Ducks were found almost everywhere in the shallow waters.

As there was no particular need to get back to Four Island Camp on any special day the two boys took things slowly, and spent much time examining the ponds and backwaters in the vicinity

of the river. One evening after having made their camp they went out in the canoe to look at an interesting beaver pond. The dam was formed in the shape of the letter S, that is to say, it was doubled curved, one side bowed up stream and the other down stream and the material composing the structure differed from any they had seen previously, including a large number of stones besides the usual sticks and sod. Some of the stones were of considerable size and weighed perhaps fifteen or twenty pounds. After a thorough examination of the dam they turned their attention to the lodge, which had not yet received its plastering of mud. While engaged in looking at the rather unusual size of the logs used in the construction, there came the sound of something moving among the trees on the bank and, suddenly, from behind the beaver lodge, a gigantic bull moose appeared almost on top of the startled boys. For a moment the huge beast stood still in a most curious attitude and stared with lowered head at the unexpected vision of the canoe and its occupants. Then, turning sharply and giving a strange grunt, he trotted off without appearing to mind how much noise he made as his great horns crashed through the branches, and yet this same animal could make his way through the thickest woods as noiselessly almost as a cat if he thought he had not been seen.

"By Jove, I thought the big beast wanted to come into the canoe! What a scare he gave me."

"Me too," Charlie replied. "But I believe he was even more frightened than we were. Did you hear something that sounded like people's voices just now while the old moose was admiring us? Let's get back to the river and see if there is any one there."

"I didn't hear anything, or, if I did, I wouldn't have noticed it, as my whole mind was occupied with our unexpected visitor, but it is getting fairly late so we might as well go back anyhow."

They had not gone far before voices were distinctly heard, also the sound of paddles. A few minutes later two well-laden canoes were seen near the camp, so the boys, anxious to see who their visitors might be, hurried along.

"Well I'll be hanged if that isn't Frank Taylor. Hello: Frank, old sport, what in thunder are you doing up here?" Charlie called out.

"Hello yourself and the same question to you. Well, this is funny, meeting up here in the wilds. And you too, Jack, why, this is great!" Then, turning to the man in the other canoe, Frank continued: "You know these two great explorers, don't you, Dad?"

"I surely do. You are the two that got lost up in Newfoundland, aren't you?"

"I believe we are," Jack replied. "This is our little one-night stand; won't you join us and make your camp here; it's not a bad spot." Then Frank introduced his friend Dick Willoughby and the guide Amos Goode, and it was agreed that they should camp together. The canoes were immediately landed and in a short time all hands were busy putting up tents. The new comers travelled in luxury, had large tents and air mattresses which rather amused Jack and Charlie, who did not believe in such unnecessary encumbrances.

CHAPTER XIII

They have some fun in camp. Air mattress affords amusement, so does a rope; a tent collapses; the boys undertake an expedition; see wolves chase a deer. Find beaver skulls and become suspicious. Meet Pete very unexpectedly! An attempt is made to burn them and they have a narrow escape.

IT WAS a jolly party that sat round the camp fire that cool autumn evening, and it was late before Mr. Taylor suggested turning in. Charlie had made up his mind to have some fun with those air mattresses which had been blown up after so much trouble, and he had quietly opened the valves while the other two boys had been getting ready for bed. The two tents belonging to the four boys were pitched close together and Charlie and Jack were much amused to hear the remarks about the mattresses, as the air slowly escaped under the pressure of the bodies. "These beastly things are leaking, I believe. Hang it all, we must blow them up again! That brute of a pump is busted, too; what a nuisance!" Then came the sound of vigorous blowing and once more there was quiet.

"Let's wait till they are asleep," Charlie whispered to Jack, "and then we'll open up the valves again." It was not long before the sound of even breathing was heard, and Charlie crept out of his blankets and very quietly raised the side of the neighbouring tent. The valve was soon found and opened, and he returned to the blankets. Before long there was evidence of restlessness and more remarks regarding air mattresses in general and that one in particular and once more the sound of blowing was heard. Then again all became quiet and once more Charlie repeated his efforts. Now it happened that Dick had been suspicious, and had pretended to be asleep, so he saw Charlie's hands appearing under the edge of the tent. Vengeance was sworn in a deep whisper as soon as the hands were withdrawn. For nearly an hour all was quiet then the owners of the air mattress crept out of their tent silently. A quick dive was made into the other tent. Before the two figures, so comfortably wrapped in their sleeping bags realized, the bags were securely fastened round their necks. Then they were dragged unceremoniously down to the water's edge, and deposited like sacks of potatoes in a frost covered patch of grass. "Good night, you dear boys," said Frank, as he turned to go back to his tent, "I do hope you will sleep well and that you won't need any air mat-

tresses. Call us if you want anything, though we sleep so soundly we may not hear your sweet voices. Ta! ta!"

"One on us," Charlie remarked, "and those beasts have tied me up so tightly that I cannot get my hands out. Roll over here and see if you can undo this cord with your teeth."

Jack did as he was asked, but it was a difficult task; at last, however, he succeeded in freeing Charlie who in turn let him out of his bag. The walk back to the tent in bare feet over the frosty ground was anything but pleasant and the two vowed they would get even with their friends at the first opportunity. But in the meantime they needed sleep. Next day it was decided that they should stay on in the camp as Mr. Taylor was anxious to have a try for the big moose that Charlie and Jack had seen the evening before and this decision gave Charlie the opportunity he wanted. He first of all cut a thin slab of wood, made it smooth, and smeared it with grease. This he placed under the pole of Frank's tent. To the bottom of the pole he fastened a piece of thin cord which was carefully concealed under the moss and leaves and the end hidden close to his own bed. Then at Jack's suggestion a rope with a slip knot was placed around their friend's bed, hidden between the bankets, and the end of this also led to their own tent.

Mr. Taylor returned to camp with the boys about dark, having had no luck with the moose in spite of the guide's clever calling. Unfortunately for them the wind was blowing so hard that it would have been quite possible for the moose to approach without their seeing or hearing it.

All hands were ready for bed as soon as supper had been eaten. Frank and his companion were entirely unsuspicious, after finding the valve of their bed had not been opened, and it was but a short time before they were fast asleep. The two conspirators chuckled as Charlie got hold of the rope and slowly pulled it; not much effort was required to move the pole, and it slid along the greased board in a most satisfactory way, and the next instant the tent collapsed on top of the surprised pair on the air mattress. Curiously enough they never suspected their two friends next door, but blamed the wind and incidentally themselves for having put the tent up so badly. It required some time to get the tent up securely, and they fondly imagined that no one knew of their mishap. Charlie had managed during the confusion to partly unscrew the air valve of the mattress with excellent results for in about a quarter of an hour the pair who wanted to sleep began to be painfully conscious of the marked inequalities of the ground and the two conspirators heard whispered remarks

of a most uncomplimentary nature; but just as Frank and Dick started to get out of their blankets the rope was suddenly pulled vigorously and they were securely tied together, very much to their surprise. Charlie and Jack roared with laughter as they pulled the struggling but helpless couple out of their tent.

"So you thought you had scored last night, did you?" they both asked. "Now, look here, we have very kind hearts but are great believers in precaution. We will give you your choice. Either you declare pax, or we take you down to the water's edge, and fasten you up there for the rest of the night, and it's a nice cool night, too." Needless to say pax was declared by the two helpless victims and soon the camp was quiet again. The following morning the little party broke up after much good humoured bantering and Charlie and Jack once more made their way up river.

For some days after the return to camp the weather behaved very badly. Frequent rain and incessant wind which blew with such force that the beautiful scarlet and yellow leaves of the maples, birches, and poplars were stripped from the branches and sent whirling in coloured wreaths through the woods till they came to rest on the ground on which they formed a carpet that rivalled in richness of hue the most wonderful Persian

carpet. Following the spell of stormy weather there came several days of bitter cold and the edges of the ponds were fringed with ice. During these evenings the camp fire burned brightly and its comforting warmth made a strong appeal.

One fine day the boys, carrying supplies for a few days, went off for a trip across country to see what was happening in beaver-land. The first lodges they visited were found to have received their plastering of mud and looked very smooth and tidy. This mud is not applied until there is frost as it would wash off under heavy rain, but once it freezes, the lodge is safe from the attacks of any wild animals. Wolves may prowl round during the bitter winter nights when hunger grips their bellies. They may hear the fat, sweet-fleshed beaver talking in the seclusion of their homes. But the frozen mud is like a coat of armour and in vain the famished beasts bite and tear at the hardened walls. The beaver with his wonderful wisdom has foreseen the possibility of these attacks and he has safe-guarded himself most thoroughly. The plaster of mud covers all parts of the lodge above water except the extreme summit which is left bare, and the network of sticks is arranged so that the vitiated air can escape through this curious flue. Yet the tangled sticks are locked together by the frozen mud and no animal can find a way

through. When snow covers the country and the lodge resembles one of the numberless inequalities of the ground, the careful observer will note a film of vapour rising into the cold air from the top of the snow-concealed house, and this unfortunately gives the trapper the information he wants, for it tells him the house is occupied.

The two explorers, having examined several of the lodges, steered in a westerly direction, determined to go farther than on any previous occasion. While they were sitting round a small fire enjoying their midday meal a curious sound was heard. For some time they wondered what it was and where it came from; then Charlie, happening to glance upward, saw that the sound came from among the clouds; cutting their way through the sky, a flock of geese were passing in regular V-shaped formation; with wonderful speed they flew and were soon lost to view. Evidently the recent cold had started the birds on their southward migration.

The meal being finished, the journey to nowhere in particular was resumed, but nothing of special interest occurred during the afternoon. One rather fine stag was seen but he was not anxious for a close acquaintance with the human beings and bounded away with a disdainful display of the large white banner. It was noticeable that the

colour of this stag was a soft gray which blended well with any background, so that if the animal stood motionless he would not be easily seen. During the summer the deer are almost orange, a colour which, when seen against green foliage, is remarkably conspicuous. It is somewhat difficult to understand how this works out with the colour protection theory in which I confess to an almost disbelief, so far as it is supposed to apply to the larger animals. We often hear it urged as an example of how nature protects its animals by turning them white where the country is snow covered, and the hare is frequently the animal used in the illustration. What, then, about the weasel or ermine, its great enemy? *If* the hare is turned white *because* it needs protection, why, may it be asked, does its arch enemy receive the same protective colouring? The two conditions are hard to reconcile. For my own part I firmly believe that the turning white has some entirely different object, which at present is not understood.

Toward evening the two wanderers came to a series of beaver ponds where an immense amount of work had been done very recently. As it was too late to investigate, camp was made for the night and early the following morning they started to examine the various dams and lodges. While walking along the edge of one of the ponds they

Cutting their way through the sky, a flock of geese passed in regular V-shaped formation

found to their great surprise several fresh beaver skulls hidden among the bushes. As beaver were not allowed to be trapped this discovery was difficult to understand. Evidently some poacher was camped somewhere in the neighbourhood where he thought himself safe from observation. A further search resulted in the finding of quite a number of skulls and remains of bodies. The poacher, whoever he was, had evidently made a large haul, and the question which puzzled the boys was whether or not he was still in the neighbourhood. If so, and he knew of the boys' presence, things might become dangerously interesting as he was probably a desperate character. It was obvious that the

Like a flash the hunted doe passed, followed closely by two large wolves

less conspicuous they made themselves, the safer and better it would be for them.

If only they could catch the man it would be a great achievement, though very risky.

For some time they debated what would be the best course of action. Finally it was decided to keep a sharp lookout and, if possible, see the rascal and identify him without letting him know he was being watched. Then they would report the matter on their return to Beaver Town. Under these conditions it was advisable to make a camp in a thick wood, where they would be well concealed. A suitable place was found after some searching and the little camp was soon made.

As the sound of an axe would be heard quite a long way, everything in the way of cutting had to be done with knives. Firewood was collected from among the fallen trees. Of course the making of a fire was risky, but the evening was sure to be cold so they determined to make as small a fire as possible and not even do that until dark, when the smoke would not be seen.

During the evening a careful watch was kept near the ponds but nothing was seen of the poacher and the boys eventually started back toward their camp. They had not gone far before a strange sound was heard. What it was they could not imagine but it seemed as though some animals were rushing through the woods. At first they connected the disturbance with the poacher and crouched low as the sound drew nearer. Suddenly in the dim light something was seen to be coming straight toward where they were hidden and an instant later like a flash a hunted doe passed, followed by two large wolves. The boys were not seen either by the hunted or the hunters, even though they had passed not more than a few yards away and the panting of the wolves had been heard distinctly. The whole thing had occurred with extraordinary rapidity and the doe had vanished over the crest of the low hill before the boys realized what had happened.

A few minutes later while they were still talking about it they were surprised to see the doe returning but no longer pursued by the wolves. How she had eluded her pursuers was a mystery they could not fathom. But that she had done so was evident by her leisurely gait, as though she was absolutely sure of her safety.

Charlie suggested going over the hill and following the wolves' tracks to see what had interrupted the chase, and though it was getting late, Jack agreed to the proposition and they started. But on reaching the top of the hill they received a terrible shock. Not ten yards away stood a man armed with a rifle. Of course it must be the poacher and now he had caught them! Escape was impossible. They stood rooted to the ground, afraid to make a move in any direction. It was an awful moment.

Suddenly from out of the silence came a voice: "Evenin'" and the owner of the voice moved forward. Evidently he was not going to shoot them at once and the two frightened boys made an attempt to reply to the salutation, but their voices sounded weak and far away.

"I tink I see you at Company's store up Beaver Town, eh?"

It was poor old Pete the Indian. What a relief! The two boys grabbed his hand as though he had

been their life-long and very best friend. It appeared that Pete was still on the trail of Sneaky Bill, who had stolen his splendid silver fox skin. For weeks he had been searching the country and several times he had come on the trail only to lose it again, for Bill was no fool, and knew the country like a book. At last Pete had traced the rascal to this country which was only a few miles from where he had been when Gibson so nearly caught him, though between that time and the present Bill had travelled many weary miles in his efforts to throw all pursuers off his evil trail.

The Indian accepted Jack's invitation to come to their camp but when Charlie started to make a fire he advised him to make it very small, just enough to boil water for tea. He said that Sneaky Bill was probably somewhere not far away and if he saw a fire the whole chase would have to be begun again.

Pete's idea was to watch for his quarry and if possible catch him unawares, and take him back to Beaver Town. This would of course require both caution and skill, to say nothing of patience, but he was determined to catch the man, even though it took him years. Before going to sleep he told in his broken English how Gibson and Cooper had very nearly caught Bill two or three times and he believed they were still on the trail.

Shortly before daylight the smell of smoke awakened Pete. He quickly roused the sleeping boys. Undoubtedly a forest fire was sweeping toward them, and, strangely enough, it appeared to be coming from several directions. Fortunately there was very little wind so it was travelling slowly. Pete helped the boys to pack up camp and in a few minutes they all moved away. Presently escape seemed cut off in every direction. They found themselves completely surrounded by a circle of flame and smoke. The country was very dry and in spite of the lack of wind the fire burned fiercely. The situation was critical and it looked as though the three were trapped. Pete decided to make a counter fire and by this means perhaps clear a space; so three large torches of birch bark were quickly made and with them a line of fire was soon started and allowed to burn only in one direction. It was not long before this cleared a broad path, but the smoke and heat were well nigh insufferable. Only by lying down and putting their faces in the wet moss could they escape the pungent fumes.

All this time the circle of fire was closing in with deadly certainty. The crackling of the flames sounded like the constant rattle of a machine gun. It was touch and go, whether the ground where the counter fire had burned would be cool enough

to walk over before the circle closed about the trio.

If not, their doom was sealed. Closer and closer came the line of fire, and when the blaze caught a silvery birch here and there it would climb up the inflammable bark like a hundred fiery snakes, hissing and spluttering in a terrifying way. These great torches lighted up the woods and ground and threw a glow of orange on the pallid faces of the three trapped human beings whose eyes, smarting from the smoke looked first one way and then another in the hope of some sign of relief.

As the fire crept nearer and nearer the heat became intolerable. Pete said they must chance going over the still smouldering ground that had burned. So, after slipping some moss into their moccasins, they made a run for it. Their only chance was to find either a stream or perhaps a rock on which they might stand until the fire had passed on either side. Luck was with them for after going a short distance they came to a piece of rock-strewn ground over which the fire had found little that would burn, so the stones were cool. The idea of putting moss in their moccasins had been a good one; though the leather was badly burned, their feet had not suffered in the least.

During this long period of anxiety and discomfort the day had broken clear and bright above the pall

of dark smoke which under the driving power of a rising breeze was travelling northward with ever-increasing speed. The danger to Pete and the two smoke-begrimed boys was passed so far as the fire was concerned; but their troubles were not yet over. Pete suggested having some tea to brace them up but unfortunately they had no water and it was not safe to venture over the hot ground for the present, so they waited a couple of hours before making an attempt to find water. A small stream was eventually discovered and the longed-for tea was soon made. This with food refreshed the three and gave them courage and energy.

It was difficult to know what to do next, or which way to go. Without doubt Sneaky Bill was the author of the fire; he had evidently discovered his danger and thought the easiest way out was to destroy his pursuers by burning them so that no trace of the crime would be left. Whether he would make a search for the camp to see if his fell intentions had succeeded, there was no way of telling, but being at heart a coward he was more likely to leave the country without troubling to investigate. Pete suggested that they should make their way cautiously toward the stream which was the outlet of the lake, and down which Bill would probbably go with his canoe.

CHAPTER XIV

A skull and bones are found, also important marks of identification. Sneaky Bill and Pete do some shooting. Gibson and Cooper take a hand in the chase. The race for life. Sneaky Bill meets his end. The boys return home and say good-bye to Beaver-land.

THE two boys were greatly excited at the prospect of this game of hide and seek under the guidance of the crafty Indian, and they started off through the burned woods keeping a careful lookout for any trace of the rascally half-breed.

While making their way through what had been a very dense part of the woods, but which was now a tangle of charred and smoking trees and undergrowth, Charlie happened to notice what looked like a curious smooth white stone and he turned aside to examine it. To his great surprise the stone proved to be a human skull, and he quickly called his companions to come to see it. Pete picked up the skull which was apparently many years old and found a deep gash on one side which had evidently been made with an axe. A careful

search among the stones and burned wood led to the discovery of the rest of the human bones, the fire had charred them and destroyed whatever there had been in the way of clothing. Among the ashes a few buttons were found, also a rusty knife, a pair of folding scissors and a rather peculiar buckle formed by two letters, R. A. As these might possibly be of use in identifying the unfortunate man they were wrapped up carefully and taken away.

For more than an hour after this gruesome find the three continued their way through the burnt woods before they came to a narrow swamp which had defied the fire. On the farther side of this swamp was a low, wooded knoll or island which stretched back about a mile with swampy ground and ponds on either side. To cross to the knoll over the open swamp was a risky proceeding so Pete led the way along the edge of the burnt woods till he came to a beaver pond which was fringed with alders and willows. These afforded ample cover so he crept through them with the boys following close at his heels. In this way they reached the edge of the wooded island. According to Pete's ideas this was a most likely place for Bill to have taken himself. Here he could keep a lookout over the open swamp and escape without much difficulty in the event of any one approaching. After the dastardly attempt to burn them, Pete did not feel

that there was the slightest reason why he should not take his friend Bill "dead or alive" and as he expressed this opinion in a quiet whisper he examined the rifle he was carrying to see that it was in perfect order. Charlie and Jack, who both agreed that Sneaky Bill should be taken regardless of method, deeply regretted not having brought their rifles. The adventure had developed beyond their wildest expectations and they felt that, being unarmed, they would not be able to take their full share in whatever happened.

Pete decided to walk along the edge of the wood a few hundred yards before entering, as the tangle was so dense where they were that it would have been impossible to get through quietly. As soon as a suitable place was found the three hunters crept up the slight rise, making scarcely any sound as they moved over the carpet of fallen leaves. It was Pete's intention to reach the ridge of the island and follow it along its full length. Before he had gone more than three hundred yards he stopped suddenly as he came to where the leaves had been disturbed. Only a keen eye could have noticed it, and he bent down to examine the leaves in order to make sure whether they had been moved by man's clumsy foot.

As he was leaning down with the two boys close beside him there came a sharp ping in the air fol-

lowed instantly by the loud report of a rifle. Instinctively the three dropped flat on the ground; a few seconds passed in breathless silence, then Pete edged his way to a large, shaggy birch. As he was about to rise another shot rang out and the bullet grazed Charlie's shoulder cutting his clothing but scarcely scratching the skin. Charlie filled with curiosity had raised himself up a little and his imprudence had very nearly cost him his life. But the shot had shown Pete more or less where the bullet had come from, and he watched carefully for the least sign of his adversary. For a long time nothing occurred to break the peace of the autumn woods save the rustling of the leaves, and the call of the chicadees. Then Pete saw a twig move and he fired. Almost at the same moment the sound of another shot came from a different direction, and Pete wondered who could have fired it. Again there was silence which lasted a long time. Pete left the large birch tree and crept away.

For nearly half an hour the boys were left wondering what was happening when several shots fired in rapid succession were heard down in the direction of the swamp. Throwing caution to the winds they got up and ran down the hill, when suddenly they saw two men going in the same direction. The two men were Gibson and Cooper. With mutual surprise the four met at the edge of the

woods and they saw Pete some distance away dodging among the undergrowth of the swamp, and still farther away a man was seen running frantically toward a large pond. To overtake him was impossible so Cooper called to Gibson to follow and make for the canoe which they had left hidden near the stream about a mile below.

Sneaky Bill, seeing what was happening, and that his escape was threatened, made all possible speed along the edge of the pond dodging several long-distance shots from Pete, who was following as fast as he could over the uneven, swampy ground. Bill had the advantage in the race as he was on fairly firm ground and he managed to reach his canoe unhurt. Once in the water he increased his lead with ease, but before him were the two policemen and it was just a chance whether he could pass their canoe, wherever it was, and of course he did not know, before they reached it. Every second was valuable and the hunted rascal exerted himself to the utmost. Charlie and Jack could see him and were struck by the curious way in which he used the pole to force the canoe along. Apparently he did it almost entirely with one hand and yet so skillfully did he handle the pole that the canoe seemed to fly over the water.

Pete, seeing how things were going, came running back to the boys and said he was going to get to

his canoe which he had left well hidden in a small stream some distance below. The boys being in good condition had little difficulty in keeping up with the swift footed Indian and together they raced along, cutting across the woods and down into the swamp on the other side and finally reached the canoe very much out of breath. In the distance they could hear the sounds of paddling which showed that Gibson and Cooper had started down stream.

It was to be a race for life, down with the current, round sharp bends, over newly finished beaver dams and through small ponds where beaver houses were passed unnoticed. Bill had got a good lead, and a very small, light canoe. But his day had come. Slowly but surely his pursuers were overhauling him. By the time he reached the large swift river he was not more than five or six hundred yards ahead. For a few minutes the rapid current gave him some advantage and he gained a couple of hundred yards. This was quickly lost when the two other canoes scarcely four hundred yards apart came flying into the same current.

The river was a succession of rapids, in the midst of which jutted great foam-splashed boulders ready to destroy anything that dared to touch them. It was dangerous work taking a canoe through these white waters, and required quick judgment to

select the safest passage, and untiring strength to twist and turn the frail craft among the rocks and curling eddies.

Bill was having more than he could manage. His right arm seemed to be of little use and he made the most desperate efforts with his left to steer the canoe past the innumerable dangers. But it was more than man could do and suddenly with a sickening crash his canoe hit broad side on a sharp boulder and was instantly smashed into kindling wood. The wretched man disappeared in the seething water with a howl of despair which was heard even above the roar of the river.

Within a second or two both the following canoes had reached the spot but they were forced past it before a reasonably safe place could be found to turn in toward the bank. To render any help was out of the question. The river after all had been the judge, the jury, and the executioner. Sneaky Bill had paid the price and justice had been strangely satisfied. The splendid dog he had so relentlessly killed had exacted retribution. Bill's arm had never recovered from the bite, and he had been unable to handle his canoe as he would otherwise have done.

"Well, I suppose it has turned out as well as could be hoped," Cooper remarked. "He has got what was coming to him and what he jolly well

deserved and the world is infinitely better without him. He has certainly led us a merry dance and I'll have to acknowledge he was not much of a fool. Several times after we left you at Four Island Lake we were very close on his trail, but he always managed to give us the slip."

"What 'bout my fox skin, you no find 'em, eh?" asked Pete.

"No, Pete, my boy. We have not found any sign of your fox skin, but it may yet turn up and if it doesn't, why you will have to go and catch another. We saw two the other day and they were beauties, black as ink. Gibson says he could have shot them both, but, unfortunately, making a noise was the one thing we wanted to avoid, so we had to watch a thousand dollars walk off without so much as a thank you. Now tell us about what happened to you and how you got mixed up with that fire. You seem to be still carrying very black faces as though you were in mourning for your friend Bill."

Charlie and Jack between, told of what had happened and how they had found the skeleton. They showed Cooper the articles they had picked up. Only the belt interested him. He referred to a small pocket notebook that he always carried with him, a strange little book filled with a curious assortment of notes and sketches. Soon he came to some remarks about the American who had so

mysteriously disappeared. Roy Allister was the name. Among the notes was the following to be used for identification: "wearing a leather belt with peculiar hand-made copper buckle formed of the letters R. A."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" Cooper exclaimed. "So that's what happened to the poor Yankee! We were always pretty sure Bill had done him in but never could prove it and even this would scarcely be sufficient to hang a man I suppose. After all it only identifies Allister and proves that he was killed with an axe, according to your description of the cut in the skull. Well, it doesn't make much difference, now. Perhaps they'll meet on the other side of the Great Divide and settle it between themselves, and I hope poor Bebé will be there to get in his little bit."

"What about trying to recover the body?" asked Gibson.

"I'm blowed if I know," Cooper replied. "If we do, it's going to be a horrid nuisance, but I suppose we have got to make some effort or there'll be questions asked. Perhaps we had better go down the river a bit and select some place where the water is reasonably quiet and take turns at watching. We can all camp together." That seemed the best plan so they went down the river a few miles until a suitable place was found

which combined a good camp site with a quiet stretch of water at the head of a very shallow rapid. But the watchers saw nothing and at noon the following day they decided to continue the journey to Beaver Town, and report what had happened.

Pete left the boys at the foot of MacPherson's trail and they went back to camp thoroughly tired out by the excitement of the past days. Time had scarcely come for them to return home but the recent events had rather upset them and they decided to break up camp. Perhaps they were homesick, and did not know it.

A week later they arrived safely in Boston and were soon in their comfortable home. Mrs. Sylvester welcomed the two browned boys and blessed the doctor who had advised their going north. Evelyn was more glad than she knew to see them both safely back and showed them Big-ears happily ensconced in his new home. Here he was safe from the prowling lynx and fox and she hoped that Fluff and Greedy, to say nothing of poor little scolding Flip-tail, would live comfortably through the winter and be on hand to welcome them all when they paid another visit to beaver-land.

THE END

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